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**THE *OTHER* LEADERSHIP:**

**The Nature of the Leadership Experiences of Anglo  
Female Middle School Principals in a  
Male-Defined Arena**

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**THE *OTHER* LEADERSHIP:**  
**The Nature of the Leadership Experiences of Anglo**  
**Female Middle School Principals in a**  
**Male-Defined Arena**

by

**Cathy Anderwald Jones, B.S.; M.Ed.**

**DISSERTATION**

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the aspiring female administrators out there.  
Let us not be silent.

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**THE *OTHER* LEADERSHIP:**  
**The Nature of the Leadership Experiences of Anglo**  
**Female Middle School Principals in a**  
**Male-Defined Arena**

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This study explored the nature of the leadership experiences of three female middle school principals. It focused on the perceptions of leadership from the viewpoint of Anglo female leaders and how they interacted with the male constructed role of the middle school principalship. This study addressed one overarching question: What is the nature of leadership experiences of Anglo female middle school principals in a male dominated arena? Two supporting subquestions were also addressed: (a) In what way do female middle school principals interpret and interact with societal constructions of leadership based on gender role expectations? (b) What are the perspectives on leadership provided by Anglo female middle school principals, and how do these contribute to new understandings or theories of leadership?

This multiple case study used qualitative research methods to explore the experiences of three Anglo female middle school principals in Texas. The participants for the study were chosen using a purposeful sampling which included intensity sampling, homogeneous sampling, and convenience sampling as described by Patton (1990). The participants were three Anglo female middle school principals who were shadowed during campus visits for observational data collection. In addition, two in-depth individual interviews and one collaborative group interview were conducted.

This study sought to contribute to the limited understanding of the challenges and contributions of female middle school leaders. The study revealed two emerging themes: the middle school principalship is both challenging and sacrificial in nature for females. In regard to how the participants' gender coincided with the male social construct, the study revealed that gender does make a difference in how females interpret and interact in the middle school principalship. This was evidenced through denial, a lack of awareness, or a conscious or unconscious silence. Additionally, the study illustrated that the participants shared four leadership perspectives: servant leadership, collaborative leadership, instructional leadership, and nurturing leadership.

The study concluded with two implications for educational administration practice along with recommendations for further research that could enrich the field of educational administration from a female perspective at the middle school level.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Women are underrepresented in school leadership positions, particularly at the middle school, high school, and superintendency levels (Department of Education, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 1994; Weber, Feldman, & Poling, 1981).

While this information is certainly disheartening, it does not seem to be getting the attention it deserves or what is required in order to remedy the situation. Upon further investigation of this disparity, it was discovered that some research has been conducted in regard to what it is like to be a female superintendent (Skrla, 2000; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000) or a female high school principal (Berman, 1982; Eckman, 2003; McGovern-Robinett, 2002; Mertz & McNeely, 1998). However, there was little research evidence regarding the female middle school principal. Based on the research conducted by McGovern-Robinett (2002) in the area of female high school leadership, the idea for this study was born. While McGovern-Robinett's study focused specifically on documenting the story of three female high school principals as experienced within a male-dominated social construct, this study will focus on the experiences of three female middle school principals.

McGovern-Robinett's research, as well as the research of many others, has documented the lack of literature in regard to female upper level leaders. As she noted, there is little known about what it is like to be a female principal at the high school level. This is also true when searching for literature regarding female middle school

principals—their story too has largely gone unmentioned, unresearched, undocumented, and their voices unheard.

Therefore this study replicates McGovern-Robinett's study at the middle school level. It focuses on three female principals and their experiences as leaders of middle schools. This research was designed to allow female middle school principals the opportunity to tell their stories in their own voice of how they operate within a male-dominated social construct.

This study contains a total of six chapters. The first chapter provides the background of the problem, the statement of the problem, and the purpose of the study. This is followed by the research questions, a brief review of the methodology, and definitions of specific terms used throughout the study. Chapter One concludes with the limitations of the study, the significance of the study, and a brief summary of the chapter.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM**

Following the passage of Title IX in the early 1970's, which prohibited sex discrimination, the women's movement was refueled and an abundance of research about female leadership was conducted and published (Cunningham, 1990). However, research about female leadership tapered off ten to fifteen years later, with very little published research in the past twenty years. There has been limited research specifically in the area of secondary female leaders, which may be due to several different reasons. According to the National Education Association, as cited in Mertz and McNeely (1998), comprehensive national studies by individual position have not been reported,

nor do most state departments of education collect and/or report such data. Researchers and reporters tend to aggregate positions and there may also be limited samples used in the studies.

Due to this lack of a systematic data collection process, Mertz and McNeely (1998) claim that what we know about school administration derives almost exclusively from the experiences of the dominant officeholders—the white male. From its inception, school administration has been male-dominated and male defined. It has been explained, conceptualized and seen through the eyes of males.

The existing research on female school leaders is limited and inconsistent. This can be partially attributed to poor record keeping in many districts. Therefore, we are unable to determine nationwide the number of women in school administration by position due to the lack of a reliable, uniform nationwide database that lets us know just how many women are school leaders and at what levels (Shakeshaft, 1994). It is truly ironic that with such an availability of data and statistics these days, data regarding female leaders is so obscure. Some believe this to be a “conspiracy of silence” which could hardly be unintentional (Shakeshaft, 1994, citing Tyack and Hansot).

Shakeshaft believes this ‘conspiracy of silence’ has political ramifications and that annual comparisons by sex and race are imperative in order to know if things are improving, getting worse, or staying the same. The lack of data makes justification for action difficult as it becomes more complex to identify and remedy the condition of the underuse of women in schools (1994).

Although females have gradually moved into administrative positions in the past twenty years, there is still a great disparity compared to the proportion of female teachers that exist (Hicks, 1991; Mertz & McNeely, 1998). Even though strides are being made, there still exists a climate and culture problem within our society. Noddings (1991), citing Grumet, says, “Feminists often charge that the culture of schools, especially secondary schools, is masculine” (p. 65). Therefore, women who defy traditional organization and values must prove themselves capable of doing so.

Although some reports show a gradual increase of women in the principalship, it is more likely to be at the elementary level, as opposed to secondary level (Crandall & Reed, 1986; Dardaine-Raguet & Russo, 1994; Holloway, 2000). In 1990-91, about half of all teachers at the secondary level were women, however they comprised only about 10% of all principals (National Center for Education Statistics, 1994). By 1999-2000, 43.7% of all public school principals were women. Broken down by grade levels, this translates to 55% female elementary principals, 31.4% female middle school principals, and 21.3% female high school principals (Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Ross, & Chung, 2003). While the role of the female principal has become more accepted at the elementary level, being a female secondary principal, in and of itself, remains somewhat of an anomaly.

Cultural beliefs and societal roles also play a significant role in creating a division of labor where teaching is an acceptable career for women but positions of leadership continue to be reserved for men. Therefore, when women enter teaching,



they are expected to stay there. Noddings (1991) tells us that “The male experience is the standard not only in education but, more generally, in all of public policy” (p. 65).

Ortiz’s (1982) research on career patterns of women and minorities found that organizations and their demands are still based on male orientation. Females must therefore not only be able to do a good job, but also to take on organizational and cultural change (Ortiz, 1982). It is believed by many that women have to be better than good, for the sake of their gender. It’s as if women are functioning in a time warp—while they are struggling to gain career status, society still views them in terms of “pre WWII norms” (Young, 1976).

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

A disparity continues to exist between the number of female teachers and the proportion of female leaders. Early research tells us that “Though women are the majority of the employees in education, they are the minority of leaders at all levels and their numbers decrease with each step up the hierarchical ladder to near non-representation at the top (Greer & Finley, 1985; Gates et al., 2003). Despite gains in the number of degrees awarded to women at all educational levels, the gains for women in public school administration have been minimal. While women are underrepresented in leadership positions in all segments of our society, they are virtually excluded from higher levels of educational leadership (Dardaine-Ragguet & Russo, 1994; Greer & Finley, 1985; Noddings, 1991; Jones & Montenegro, 1982, 1990). “What we have witnessed is an absence of women from power” (Dardaine-Ragguet & Russo, 1994, p. 398).

This bias may be influenced by a strong cultural norm that encourages men to seek managerial positions while discouraging women from seeking these positions and has resulted in a steady decline in the number of female public school leaders from the 1940's to 1980's (Picker, 1980).

The inequality of female representation is evident at each level of administration. This unequal representation is a hindering factor as the nation attempts to achieve excellence in schools, for excellence cannot be achieved without equity. The reason for this inequality of female representation is woven into the history of the social structuring of this country. It is embedded in the history of male and female participation in the economy, in changes in cultural norms for women's behavior, in the development of the family, and in the evolution of social organizations such as schools (Ginn, 1988, p. 2).

Therefore, there is a need for research that will provide an opportunity for female middle school leaders to tell their stories, share their perceptions regarding their leadership experiences as they function within an androcentric social construct.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to explore the nature of the leadership experiences of three female middle school principals—in essence, how they perceive school leadership as they function within a male-dominated social construct. As Shakeshaft (1994) stated, “We need to understand how women become and remain school administrators” (p. 357).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that guided this study originated from McGovern-Robinett's research on female high school principals. The original questions were modified in order to focus on the *middle school* female principal. As in the original study, the research questions consist of one main question and two sub-questions:

1. What is the nature of leadership experiences of Anglo female middle school principals in a male-dominated arena?
  - a. In what way do female middle school principals interpret and interact with societal constructions of leadership based on gender role expectations?
  - b. What are the perspectives on leadership provided by Anglo female middle school principals, and how do these contribute to new understandings or theories of leadership?

## METHODOLOGY

In replicating McGovern-Robinett's research, this study employed qualitative methods and a multiple case study approach with three current female middle school principals. Two in-depth individual interviews and one focus group interview were conducted. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. NVIVO qualitative computer software was used to code the data. To help ensure the validity and trustworthiness of this data, triangulation and member checks were performed with each principal following the completion of coding the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In addition to the individual and group interviews, data was collected through observations during three site visits to each of the participant's schools wherein the researcher shadowed the principal. The researcher kept a journal of field notes of the daily interactions the principals had with various stakeholders in and out of the school setting. Observations and personal anecdotes were also documented in the research journal in order to capture each principal's leadership style. The researcher's journal of field notes includes the personal reflections of the researcher during and after the campus visits and interviews. Any documents or correspondence provided by the participants, such as campus plans, agendas from meetings, and/or minutes, were also analyzed (McGovern-Robinett, 2002).

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

In order to provide conceptual understanding of this study, a clear definition of certain terms is necessary. The terms androcentric, glass ceiling, token, and middle schools are concepts used throughout this study and will be defined below:

### **Androcentric:**

“Centered or focused on men, often to the neglect or exclusion of women” (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Historically, the male perspective is assumed to be the expected standard, which is referred to in this study as the androcentric bias. Shakeshaft (1989), whose work is cited in this study, uses this term frequently throughout her research on women leaders and states: “Androcentrism is the practice of viewing the world and shaping reality from a male perspective” (p. 94). The androcentric view favors the promotion of men and the marginalization of women.

**Gender:**

“Sexual identity, especially based in relation to society or culture” (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.). In studying women in education, Gosetti and Rusch (1995) provide this observation about gender: “Gender not only includes the embedded values and beliefs of a dominant patriarchal system but is embedded itself in how we view issues related to leadership theory and practice (p. 16.)

**Glass Ceiling:**

“An unacknowledged discriminatory barrier that prevents women and minorities from rising to positions of power or responsibility, as within a corporation” (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.). The term “glass ceiling” is referenced in this research as a legitimate barrier facing female leaders and was found repeatedly throughout the literature review.

**Middle School:**

“A school at a level between elementary and high school, typically including grades five through eight” (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.). The three middle school campuses used in this study are comprised of sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

**Token:**

“One that represents a group, as an employee whose presence is used to deflect from the employer criticism or accusations of discrimination” (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Being a token is sometimes referred to as “tokenism,” which is a term also used in this research. Ortiz (1982) uses these terms

frequently in her research, which is cited throughout this study. She says that tokens experience a disproportionate focus on their appearance and non-ability traits.

### **LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study is limited by its qualitative research design and its use of interviews, observations, and field notes to gather data. The results of this research, therefore, have limited generalizability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study focused on the experiences of three Anglo female middle school principals in select districts of schools with at least an acceptable rating from the Texas Education Agency. This study did not evaluate the performance of the principals; nor was it intended to include, examine, or analyze male principals, principals who are of color, or principals from elementary or high school levels.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study will contribute to the theory and knowledge of what it is like to be a female middle school leader in an effort to build “theory grounded in the actual experience and language of women” (DuBois as cited in Mertz & McNeely, 1998, p. 197). This research can offer the female middle school principal’s perspective on school leadership and will be helpful to students in preparation programs and to practitioners of educational administration in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. This study will also contribute to the theory and knowledge base regarding female secondary principals, particularly at the middle school level where there have been limited studies conducted.

## **SUMMARY**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an introduction to the study of three female middle school principals. It included a summary of the rationale for this study, including the statement of the problem and a brief description of the background of the problem. This chapter also provided the research design, including the research question and sub-questions, the qualitative methods to be used, the limitations and delimitations, as well as the significance of the study.

This study report is organized into six chapters. Chapter II contains a review of the literature that provides the historical background of female leadership and the related research that frames the need for more research in the specific area of female middle school principals. Chapter III provides an explanation of the methodology used to collect the data for this research. Chapter IV offers a detailed profile of each of the research participants and their working environment. Chapter V presents the findings and results of the research.

The conclusion of this research endeavor is provided in Chapter VI. This final chapter presents a summary of the researcher's major findings, conclusions, and implications for further research. The appendices containing consent forms and interview questions follows the summary. A complete list of references follows the appendices, with the last page of the research document containing the personal vita of the researcher.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

“The female half of our population has often been ignored, ridiculed, thwarted, or prevented from considering leadership roles” (p. 6). This statement from Hill and Ragland’s 1995 book entitled, Women as Educational Leaders: Opening Windows, Pushing Ceilings, captures the essence of this topic and serves as the perfect introduction to this chapter. In fact, men’s life patterns have become the norm against which women are examined since there are so many of them receiving and retaining administrative positions (Smulyan, 2000).

According to Shakeshaft (1989) “Studying male behavior, and more particularly white male behavior, is not in and of itself a problem, it becomes a problem when the results of studying male behavior are assumed appropriate for understanding all behavior” (p. 325). Unfortunately, this androcentric view has been the standard throughout history and throughout the review of the literature on this topic. It has been assumed that the white male administrative experience (and most administrators are white males) is the same experience for everyone. To date there has been limited research on female secondary principals; therefore, the purpose of this chapter will be to synthesize the existing literature as it pertains to secondary female leaders.

Recurrent themes that emerged throughout the literature will be highlighted and presented in the following pages. This chapter will provide an historical background of



the topic, as well as information about the barriers female leaders encounter. This chapter will also include information regarding a woman's way of leading and will conclude with promising possibilities of changes occurring in the field of administration for females, reference to other studies about female school leaders, and the conclusion.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

As noted above, there is a great need for additional research in the area of female school leaders. This is due to the decline of research on women leaders since the late 1970's and early 1980's following the resurgence of the women's movement. Although some research supports gains being made in the number of females holding administrative positions, this number is certainly not representative of the number of females qualified to take on these positions. Freedman's study claimed that there were fewer female leaders in 1980 than there were the decade before in 1970. This was attributed to budget cuts, decentralization, and decreasing enrollments (Freedman, 1980). The shortage of female leaders is not a new phenomenon, but rather a continuation of a social construct that has existed for over a century and continues today (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Newton, Geisen, Freeman, Bishop & Zeitoun, 2003; Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

### **Background History**

For over a hundred years, women have comprised the majority of the teaching staff in public schools. This was due to several reasons, one being that women were willing to work for less money than men. Typically, a woman's salary was one-half to three-quarters less than what a man would earn working in the same position (Biklen &

Brannigan, 1980). Therefore, staffing schools with women became a wise economic choice. Although some men were teachers, they rarely made teaching their career. Men often moved out of teaching after a few years and into better paying positions.

In addition to women being seen as cheap labor, society in general believed that women were “fit” for teaching due to their maternal destiny (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980). It was believed that women were committed to their families and homes and that most would eventually leave the profession to marry and raise their children. Services provided by teachers were viewed as fitting for women, of little professionalism, and lacking autonomy. Society had little respect for teachers and saw them as having “a lack of drive toward intellectual mastery” (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980, p. 6).

Women were also perceived as being more compliant than men. This was believed to allow greater control by the superintendent of his female subordinates (Ortiz, 1982). Throughout history, men were also required to enlist in military services and were often called away to fight in wars. This created more opportunities for women to fill teaching vacancies left by men. However, once men returned from war, they were provided opportunities (such as the GI Bill) to attain advanced degrees and move into management and administrative positions (Shakeshaft, 1987).

As a result of these opportunities provided to men and societal beliefs about teachers, the female pool of teachers did not grow many leaders. For female teachers who aspired to become school leaders, the career path was quite typical: first gain classroom experience, then move up the ranks to either a specialist or assistant principal position, and later be promoted to the principalship (Ortiz, 1982).

Even though only a small proportion of teachers were men, it was men who moved up the ranks more quickly and more often to the principalship. Teaching is one of the few professions where the entry-level position is dominated by females (67%) while the upper levels of administration are dominated by males (86%) (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980; Jones & Montenegro, 1982, 1990). Unfortunately, this trend has changed very little throughout history and will be documented in the following section.

### **Historical Data**

Reliable data regarding female leaders has typically been inconsistent and unavailable (Jones & Montenegro, 1982; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1987). Unfortunately, there have been no standardized methods established or maintained for collecting this data. However, we do know that while demographic trends suggested that females would comprise almost 50% of the labor force by 2000, females remain underrepresented at every level of school administration (Dardaine-Ragguet & Russo, 1994).

According to the National Education Association (NEA), from 1900-1927 the women's movement resulted in an increase in the number of female principals. However, the number of women principals declined between 1928 and 1972. For example, women had 55% of principalships in 1928 but only 20% in 1973. In 1970-71, 67.2% of teachers were female while only 15.3% of principals were female. Women held 21% of the elementary principalships, 3.5% of the junior high school principalships, and 3% of the high school principalships (Ortiz, 1982).

In 1973, males comprised only 16% of elementary teachers, but occupied 80% of the elementary principalships. At the secondary level, 50% of the teachers were female but 97% of middle school principals and 99% of high school principals were males. Males also held 99% of all superintendencies and 97% of all assistant superintendencies. By 1976, women constituted 84.7% of elementary school faculties; but only 19.4% were elementary school principals (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980).

Although the number of female elementary school principals increased from 30% to 37% between 1987-1991, there was no change in the percentage of female secondary school principals during these years. In the 1990-91 school year, about half of all secondary teachers were female while only one-tenth of secondary principals were female (National Center for Education Statistics, 1994).

By 1999-2000, according to the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), 55% of elementary principals were female, 31.4% of middle school principals were female, and 21% of high school principals were female (Gates et al., 2003).

Of the women who do make it into the administrative ranks, they are still more likely to get a central office position rather than a principalship and earn significantly less than their male counterparts (Ortiz, 1982; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Newton et al, 2003). Because it takes women longer to achieve the same rank as men, female principals are likely to be approximately ten years older than male principals.

While women have made gains in educational leadership positions, it has not been without help. Legal mandates were implemented to assist females in the workforce. For example, Title VII was amended in 1972 to include prevention of sexual

harassment of female educators. Title IX of the Civil Rights Act, also adopted in 1972, prohibited discrimination based on sex in any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. In 1991, The Glass Ceiling Act of the Civil Rights Act was designed to combat gender-based discrimination at the administrative level (Dardaine-Ragguet & Russo, 1994).

Even with these mandates in place, women remain underrepresented in administrative positions (Gates, et al. 2003). So what is it about achieving an administrative position and being female that is so difficult? The next section will explore some of the barriers women face when aspiring to be an administrator.

## **BARRIERS**

Previous research by Greer and Finley (1985) reported that, “Though women are the majority of the employees in education, they are the minority of leaders at all levels and their numbers decrease with each step up the hierarchical ladder to near non-representation at the top” (p. 3). The lack of female leaders in these top positions is the result of both internal and external barriers women encounter and must overcome in their journey to become educational leaders. While these barriers present themselves at all levels of administration, they seem to be more compounded as one moves higher up the career ladder.

Some of the barriers women face include: social stereotypes, sex-role stereotypes, sex-role socialization, discrimination, career socialization, lack of mentors/role models/sponsors, tokenism, and the glass ceiling. Each of these categories will be examined in greater detail below; however, it should be noted that for the

purpose of this review, these barriers have been neatly separated and categorized.

When evidenced throughout the literature, these obstacles may have been experienced independently or interdependently with others. Many of the barriers could be categorized under one or more subheadings.

### **Social Stereotypes**

Social stereotypes are beliefs held by the general public about a certain way things are and the way they are supposed to be. In the case of females, it has been said that they are too emotional, not task oriented, talk too much, unable to maintain control and discipline, or to handle conflict and community issues. Women are often perceived as lacking confidence, having low aspirations, and a negative self image. These attributes are viewed as contradictory to the role of the principalship. Since women are typically associated with these attributes, they may not have been given the opportunity for administrative positions because they are not seen as being potential managers and leaders (Hicks, 1991; Hill & Ragland, 1995).

Unfortunately, these stereotypes of yesteryear still exist today in many ways.

Tyack and Strober, as cited in Ginn (1988) say,

To know the sex of a typical child in past or present is already to know much about how that person would be likely to participate in the sexual structure of power, prestige, and opportunity and how she or he would be shaped by cultural norms of behavior (p. 3).

Due to the persistence of these traditional social stereotypes, there is a tendency for administration to overlook qualified women for these jobs. Also because of these

stereotypes, it is more difficult for a woman to be successful when they do attain leadership positions. Women face added pressure to succeed and are criticized more harshly than men. They must also endure added scrutiny from the public and press (Crandall & Reed, 1986; Crutcher, 1992; Hicks, 1991). In fact, it has been said that “Women are inherently incapable of managing such positions...hence, these positions should be reserved for men” (Greer & Finley, 1985, p. 2).

### **Sex-Role Stereotypes**

Sex-role stereotypes are ideas that roles, jobs, and behaviors are gender specific. These ideas are introduced to us in childhood through role models, parents, schools, and the media and become ingrained beliefs by adulthood. An example of this type of sex-role stereotype is the belief that nurses, teachers, and secretaries should be females while doctors, scientists, and managers should be males. Unfortunately, this view continues to hold true in our current social construct. A Gallup poll conducted in June 2003 indicated that “A majority of women do not believe that women have job opportunities that are equal to those that men have” (Saad, 2003).

A division of labor has been created in the field of education where routine tasks become symbols of sexuality—women are teachers and men are leaders. In no other profession, except perhaps nursing, is this sex-role stereotype so blatant. “Both males and females appear to accept employment-related sex-role stereotypes with many perceiving management as a masculine arena supported by a ‘masculine ethic’” (Dardain-Ragguet & Russo, 1994, citing Adkison and Kanter, p. 403 ). In addition, the

highest paid leadership roles in education were, and often still are, reserved for men (Hill & Ragland, 1995).

Dardaine-Ragguet & Russo (1994) citing Basse, Krusell, and Alexander report:

Men's negative attitudes did not rest on the belief that women administrators were less competent or less qualified than men, but on the assumption that the presence of women as colleagues or supervisors upsets the 'traditional' relationship between the sexes (p. 403).

Such perceptions and attitudes, particularly when held by those in the position of hiring, undermine the recruitment efforts for women in administration.

More recent research has proposed that gender preference is the primary reason for the small proportion of educational administrative positions held by females (Reis, Young, & Jury, 1999; Banks, 2000). Consequently, it was perceived that most senior high school principal positions were considered to be for males, while the elementary school principalship was considered to be more of a position for females (Crandall & Reed, 1986; Picker, 1980). This stereotype is one of the main barriers inhibiting females from moving into secondary administrative positions. Therefore, those involved in the hiring of leaders must break away from traditional sex-role stereotypes and become sensitized to the idea that women can and do belong among the ranks of school leaders.

### **Sex-Role Socialization**

Sex-role socialization was also evident throughout the literature. It was overwhelmingly cited that females are socialized to be females and behave within certain parameters. For example, women have been socialized to be attached to



children and teaching. Therefore, teaching is within the cultural definition of what it is to be feminine (Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, Nowell, & Perry 2000). Paloma and Garland, as cited in Ortiz (1982), say that women are socialized to tolerate domestication, be passive, and stay in their position. Based on this sex-role socialization, it would not be in the cultural norm to be female and be an administrator. In addition, many people have set in their minds that an administrator should be a male and are reluctant to accept people who do not fit into this mold (Porat, 1991).

Because of this sex-role socialization, it is quite difficult to depart from one group and gain acceptance into a new group (Ortiz, 1982; Ortiz & Covell, 1978). Women find psychological separation and alienation from the rest of the group difficult to experience (Crutcher, 1992). In addition, Crutcher found that female teachers tended to have negative feelings toward other females who wanted to advance (1992). Therefore, it would be difficult for a teacher to leave the ranks of teaching and move to an administrative position and be easily accepted by her new peers (Ortiz, 1982; Ortiz & Covell, 1978).

Women must also deal with internal struggles, such as balancing their career and family responsibilities or feeling that they will be considered unfeminine if they are good principals (Crutcher, 1992). Most women are not comfortable seeking attention from their supervisor; therefore, they tend to wait for the job opportunity to present itself. This is typically an 'unforeseen occasion' when a principalship falls into the lap of a woman. For men, the job opportunity is theirs for the taking. More recent research

has found that females continue to let administrative opportunities pass them by (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003).

Females don't share their war stories like males do. One female superintendent said, "No one is interested in our stories. No one believes we have the same experiences. The critical point is that no one wants to hear a woman has been a heroine" (Ortiz, 1982, p. 82; Skrla, 2000; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000 ).

Even organizations themselves are socialized to accept certain behaviors and attitudes from women. In some schools, women teachers who aspired to be leaders were denied tenure and viewed as not being dedicated to their students. One female principal said, "I learned early on that women aren't expected to aspire to administrative positions. I decided to keep quiet, get experience, and an administrative credential and wait for a position somewhere" (Ortiz, 1982, p. 58). This same type of silence has been documented in Skrla's research on female superintendents (2000).

### **Discrimination**

Women who plan to enter administrative careers and cope in a basically male environment must recognize and deal with the reality that they may encounter some degree of discrimination in the selection and promotion process. Sexist remarks are something that most women have been exposed to. For an aspiring female administrator, sex discrimination runs deeper. One example of this discrimination is reflected in the marital status of principals. Whereas only 5% of male principals are single, 63% of female principals are single. This statistic sends the message that married women are not perceived as able to handle the job of principal. The assumption would

be that she is too busy with other female responsibilities such as raising the children and/or maintaining the household to be a good administrator (Ortiz, 1982; Ortiz & Covell, 1978). Additional evidence of discrimination is that women leaders are required to be more highly qualified than their male counterparts. Women must have more education and greater dedication than comparable males who are in administration (Campbell, 1982).

Further verification of the existence of sex discrimination is evidenced by the creation of a special class at the University of South Carolina to help female leaders deal with these specific issues. The class entitled, “Leadership Skills for Today’s Female Administrator” teaches females how to deal with gender specific issues such as those described here. The class provides an opportunity for female leaders to openly discuss these issues and to role play difficult situations (Pigford & Tonnsen, 1990).

### **Career Socialization**

Career socialization is the introduction into the profession where there is a mentoring and a “showing of the ropes.” Career socialization was a recurrent theme throughout the literature—most often in regard to the idea that males receive it and females do not. Career socialization often involves initiation into the hidden network or unspoken rules. Because the educational administrative setting is a male-dominated arena, career socialization is more difficult for females to obtain.

Men have the “good ol’ boys” network, which is a mentoring network of protégés and sponsors. Women are generally not privileged to this system. The game is for men, the rules are for men, and men are the gatekeepers. Women aren’t supposed to

play “the game” and certainly haven’t been provided the rules. Women leaders are often the outsiders on the inside.

Because of career socialization, many people are raised to believe that some jobs are for men (Shakeshaft et al., 2000). Administration and other positions of leadership are those jobs. Because of this, some men and women have difficulty reporting to a female supervisor. It has also been documented that women are their own worst enemies and that some women have difficulty with other women’s advancement (Shakeshaft, 1994).

Ortiz (1982) and Ortiz & Covell (1978) noted that women also tend to struggle with their initial departure from teaching and often move into positions that don’t provide opportunities for upward mobility. Female teachers typically leave their job as a teacher and move into a specialist position either at the campus or district level. However, when career patterns are studied, it is noted how difficult it is to advance to the principalship from this type of specialist position. Ortiz’s research reports that because women have come up the wrong career path, they usually lose out to white males in the competition for the principal’s position (1982, 1978).

### **Mentors, Role Models, and Sponsors**

Mentors, role models, and sponsors can play an extremely important role in supporting the female administrator. They can serve as talent scouts and can provide a social network and bonding for the newly appointed female administrator. They can provide information about job openings and administrative strategies. But because there is no “good ol’ girl” network, women must constantly work harder to prove themselves.

Crutcher (1992) found that women build self-esteem and confidence through association with a mentor. Therefore, same-sex role models are crucial for women. Unfortunately, there simply aren't enough to go around for all of the aspiring female leaders. Although females don't necessarily want to pattern themselves after men, they must often rely on men to serve as their mentors or have no mentor at all. Hopefully as more women find themselves in positions of leadership, a grass-roots network will become available to them (Hicks, 1991).

### **Tokenism**

Because there are so few upper level female leaders, women in these positions often become victims of tokenism. A token female is one who is deemed representative of all females. Tokens must typically deal with disproportionate focus on their appearance and non-ability traits. They get extra attention, are the subject of more gossip, stories, and rumors, and are always in the spotlight. This attention can produce feelings of isolation and anxiety in the woman who is the token and may also force these women to behave in ways that might not be good for them or the organization (Shakeshaft, 1986; Banks, 2000).

### **Glass Ceiling**

Picker (1980) indicates four major areas significant for the career advancement of female leaders: (1) age, (2) sponsorship, (3) career aspirations, and (4) discriminatory practices. These barriers may also contribute to what is known as the "Glass Ceiling." Shakeshaft (1987) writes extensively about this invisible barrier and

how it keeps women from moving into higher-level positions. Women typically can't break through the glass ceiling without sponsorship from one or more males.

The glass ceiling is also actualized by teaching ranks not wanting to release women and the hesitancy for the administrative ranks to accept them. In fact, some have claimed that females created the glass ceiling not males (Petrie & Lindauer, 2001). Because of the glass ceiling, some women are reluctant to express their aspirations and must subtly allow their male superiors to promote them (Ortiz, 1982). Scanlon (1997) citing Morrison, White and Van Velsor, reports that after the glass ceiling has been cracked, many women run into a second barrier—an impenetrable wall; meaning that after an initial opportunity to advance to a higher position, no other opportunities for advancement exist.

According to Marshall and Mitchell, as cited in Mertz and McNeely (1998), “The administrative culture selectively recruits only those who are seen as competent, desirable, and fit” (p. 213). If the majority of school leaders are male, does that suffice to say that only males are competent, desirable, and fit? Claims such as these stem from the androcentric viewpoint of male superiority, a topic Shakeshaft writes extensively about and the barriers it creates for females. An androcentric viewpoint portrays women as being deficient when compared to the male standard and is a view that says women are somehow internally flawed. Androcentrism is grounded in the masculine value system wherein the world is viewed and shaped via the male perspective. It is an external barrier that can only be overcome through systemic societal and institutional change.

## **A WOMAN'S WAY OF LEADING**

The data supporting women as leaders have often been ignored, submerged, and treated with skepticism (Greer & Finley, 1985). While many research studies suggest there is no difference in the leadership styles and effectiveness of men and women, the purpose of this review is to document the differences that many believe do exist for female leaders. Therefore, this section of the paper will present the literature pertinent to the differences between male and female leaders.

Some comparisons of male and female leaders either have no sex difference or show that women receive higher ratings. Eagly, Karau and Johnson (1992) as cited in Mertz and McNeely (1998), found that differences identified in male and female leaders were either insignificant or more appropriately attributable to the accommodations females made to operate in male-defined leadership positions. They suggest that the norms and demands of the position can override whatever gender differences might exist, whether because those chosen for the positions are disposed to do so, or because the role itself imposes on the individual, or both.

Other studies report that feminine modes of leadership are increasingly associated with effective administration and effective schools (Banks, 2000). For example, Porat (1991) states, "Research evidence strongly suggests that good school administration is more attuned to feminine than masculine modes of leadership behavior" (p. 414). However, women are still very likely to mimic the male leadership style because it is what is known and accepted. In addition, there are very few female leaders to serve as role models (Hill & Ragland, 1995).

Throughout the literature, there was evidence that males and females administer differently. Shakeshaft (1986) tells us that women in this female administrative culture tend to do a number of things differently than do males, and these differences have very real implications for schooling. According to Smulyan (2000),

Gender influences the principal's life and work within every context. It affects her personal experience and entry into the profession, her interactions with school community, the institutional framework within which she works, and her negotiation of historically and socially constructed norms and expectations (p. 203).

### **Characteristics**

Shakeshaft (1986) states that successful female leaders are first and foremost very much women—they don't need to take on the male role or be masculine in order to be successful. Ortiz (1982) and Shakeshaft (1986) note that women are good principals because they've spent more years in the classroom and exhibit greater knowledge of teaching methods and techniques. These female leaders emphasize achievement, coordinate instructional programs and evaluate student progress. They've been deeply involved and dedicated to their school, so they understand how it works. She states that women leaders adopt special behaviors and attitudes in order to be successful, such as not admitting being discriminated against, being very cautious, and being keenly aware of their support within the organization. Although successful women leaders are highly achievement oriented, they have become accustomed to having difficulty advancing and may be reluctant to express their aspirations.



Words typically used to describe female attributes are: nurturing, sensitive, empathetic, intuitive, compromising, caring, cooperative, and accommodative. These are also the words used to describe effective administration. Porat (1991), citing Gross and Trask, believes that this is just the type of leadership needed to revitalize instructional programs, motivate teachers, and create an effective learning environment.

### **Communication**

It has been said that language used by female leaders is different from that of males. Shakeshaft's (1986) research found that women use language that encourages community building and is more personable, polite and cheerful than the language of men. Women are more likely to express courtesy, gratitude, respect, and appreciation. They show respect for their audience through listening, echoing, summarizing, polite speech, and non-antagonistic responses. Women exhibit politeness through their listening behavior. They listen more than men and remember more of what is said by all participants. Women look at the person speaking; men do not. Women pick up on the emotional and personal issues in the conversation whereas men listen for facts.

### **Leadership Style**

Shakeshaft (1986) reports,

While men and women tend to carry out their work similarly, they may put a different emphasis on the importance of the tasks. Women approach public school administration as a service to the community, while men see the job as an indicator of personal status or achievement (p. 117-118).

Women also create a school climate more conducive to learning—one that is more orderly, safer, and quieter. Not surprisingly, academic achievement is higher in schools and districts in which women are leaders. Building community is also an essential part of a woman administrator's style (Shakeshaft, 1986).

Many researchers agree that men manage in a more direct, hierarchical style and women manage in a democratic, cooperative, collaborative style (Berman, 1982; Eagly, et al., 1992; Hicks, 1991; Shakeshaft, 1986; Banks, 2000). This participatory style appears to enhance rather than threaten the power base of female leaders.

Eagly, Karau, and Johnson (1992) studied female principals and found that in general they scored somewhat higher than male principals on measures of task-orientated style. There was less evidence of a sex difference on measures of interpersonally oriented style. Due to attitudinal bias against female leaders, they found that females are devalued relative to their male counterparts when they used an autocratic or directive style. As expected, women were more democratic and less autocratic than men. They concluded that female principals are inclined to perform their administrative roles in a style that is different from their male counterparts. In addition, women might face barriers in being selected for the roles, regardless of whether their styles are more or less effective than those of men. Although Shakeshaft (1994) is one of the leading researchers in this field, she warns, "Gender and sex differences in leadership style are far from understood, and need more examination before we are really able to know if there is a female leadership style" (p. 358).

## **Time Allotment**

Male and female leaders allocate their time differently (Shakeshaft, 1986). This is evidenced in their daily interactions, their priorities guiding their actions, in how others perceive them, and in their job satisfaction. These differences create a work environment that is qualitatively different for women than it is for men. The “altered” environment combines with differences in leadership, communication, and decision making styles to mold a feminine culture (Shakeshaft, 1986).

When specifically comparing investments of time by male and female secondary principals, women experienced a higher percentage of contacts initiated by others and with their superiors. Women had shorter periods at their desks during the day and spent more time after school. They spent more time on scheduled and unscheduled meetings and phone calls; and engaged in more cooperative planning during scheduled meetings (Berman, 1982). According to Shakeshaft (1986), “Women spend more time with people, communicate more, care more about individual differences, are concerned more with marginal students and teachers, and motivate more” (p. 121). Women are more likely to help new teachers and to directly supervise all teachers.

As a result of how women leaders spend their time, their staffs rate them higher, have higher morale, and are more productive. Students have higher morale and are more involved in student affairs when the principal is a woman. Parents at schools and districts run by women are more favorable and more involved in school life (Shakeshaft, 1986).

## **Implications**

Women leaders demonstrate the ability to empower teachers, create school communities that focus on people and learning, and develop relationships with constituencies that lead to greater interaction; then why do we not see more demand for women principals as a way of improving schools, or hear of women principals who have been unusually successful in implementing such changes? (Smulyan, 2000, p. 213).

We know that all principals experience limitations from the institutional regularities that inhibit change in schools, but in addition to these “regular” resistors to change, women must function within a system that privileges traditional patterns of male interaction, styles of leadership, and values. This system further inhibits women’s ability to act as agents of change. Therefore, some believe women must learn to play by men’s rules in order to be successful. Smulyan’s study posed the question, “Must women unconsciously silence a part of themselves and find ways to redefine the authority and power inherent in the administrator role so that their own voices can emerge?” (2000, p. 3). Skrla’s research reiterates this silence that many female administrators have consciously or unconsciously accepted (2000).

## **CHANGING TIMES**

It has been said that women must succeed not just for themselves, but for the sake of their gender (Ortiz, 1982). In order for the female half of our population not to be ignored, ridiculed, thwarted, or prevented from considering leadership roles, women must succeed and have their voices heard. Baggage from the past must be left behind in

order to move forward (Hill & Ragland, 1995). Evidence of this “moving forward” was found in the literature.

For instance, Picker (1980) and Scanlon (1997) reported that younger women entering administration are not waiting as long for their administrative appointment as did their older female colleagues; nor have they had to spend as many years in the classroom before entering into administration. These reports strongly contradict other studies and conclude that younger women also appear to be entering administrative positions on a more equal basis with their male counterparts.

In addition, public attitude toward women in leadership roles is changing. For example, in 1984, only 28% of Americans felt that the country would be better if a woman held office. By 1992, this number rose to 61% (Hill & Ragland, 1995, citing Roberts, p. 19). More women are graduating from medical school and other graduate programs such as educational administration. Strong credentials and increased experience as middle managers make women viable candidates for promotions into key positions. Increasing vacancies and growing public support for women in leadership roles add opportunities for aspiring female leaders. Such positive combinations intensify the possibilities and probabilities that women will assume important leadership roles.

According to Hill and Ragland (1995), “Cracks in the male controlled educational leadership establishment are also beginning to appear. Opportunities for women to assume leadership positions within educational communities are now available” (p. 6). Although percentages are still small, the number of women

superintendents and principals increased throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. For example, 54% of the new principals hired in 1999-2000, were women (Gates et al., 2003). In addition, 50% of school leaders will be retiring in the next 10 years, which will provide more opportunities for women to advance (Hicks, 1991).

Picker (1980) and Scanlon (1997) found that females received more sponsorship than their male counterparts—a claim that contrasts strongly with the belief that men are sponsored more than women. Picker also found that women showed greater desire to advance more than one step up the organizational ladder. Career planning and high career aspirations are important factors for success—as a woman administrator stated during her interview with Picker (1980), “If you don’t know where you’re going, you might not get there” (p. 148).

## **RESEARCH ABOUT FEMALE SCHOOL LEADERS**

The review of the literature revealed some studies about the secondary principalship, specifically studies regarding the role of the principal, career paths to the principalship, school reform, job satisfaction, and leadership style (Blank, 1987; Eagly et al., 1992; Holloway, 2000; Klecker, 1999; Martin & Willower, 1981; Richford & Fortune, 2001). However, there was limited research pertaining to the role of the secondary principalship in regard to gender identification when the principal is a female. The few research studies found that focused on the gender of the principal, were studies conducted at the high school level (Eckman, 2003; McGovern-Robinett & Ovando, 2003; McGovern-Robinett, 2002; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Mertz & McNeely, 1988; Strachan, 1999; Weckman, 2003).

In Grogan & Brunner's (2005) comparison of male and female administrators, twice as many female administrators held undergraduate degrees in education, they were more likely hired through search firms, their academic preparation was more current, and they were seen as strong instructional leaders. Females were also rated higher than males in maintaining organizational relationships, interpersonal skills, and responsive to parents and community groups. The downside of these positive affirmations for females was the statistics for the divorce rate of female administrators. Unfortunately, the career path for upper level administration leaves little time for parenthood and spousal obligations.

The only research found targeting the middle school administrator specifically was Trautman (2000) and Brown and Irby's (2003) research on synergistic leadership theory and Brown and Anfara's (2002) study of building relationships between the administrators and teachers. Therefore this study attempts to fill the gap that exists in the literature in regard to the female perspective of what it is like to be a middle school principal within a male-dominated social construct.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework upon which this study is based comes from Shakeshaft's (1999) "Stages of Research in Educational Administration" (shown below) and is supported by the findings in this review of the literature.

Stage	Description
1. Absence of women documented.	Survey analyses of how many women are administrators and what positions they hold.
2. Search for current and previous female administrators.	Historical research on key women leaders or surveys of women administrators illustrating their characteristics.
3. Women as disadvantaged or subordinate.	Surveys of attitudes toward women and their experiences that attempt to document the under-representation of female leaders.
4. Women studied on their own terms.	Through surveys, interviews, or observations, women describe their lives and experiences.
5. Women as challenge to theory.	Theoretical analyses that describe required changes for theory to include women's experience.
6. Transformation of theory.	Introduction/discussion of new theories of human behavior in organizations.

This study focuses on the fourth stage: “Women studied on their own terms” because there is limited research in this area. This study included interviews and observations of women describing their lives and experiences, as listed in the description above. However, instead of surveys, field notes were the third method for gathering data.

## SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a review of the literature in the area of female leadership. It has provided an historical context of the issue and has detailed some of the barriers that exist for current and aspiring female leaders. This chapter has also explored a woman's way of leading and has touched upon the future possibilities for female leaders. This chapter concludes with mention of other studies that have been conducted in regard to the secondary principalship, and notes the limited research that focuses on the middle school female principal. This chapter has also provided the theoretical framework of the study.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

As mentioned in Chapter I, this study replicates McGovern-Robinett's (2002) study of female high school principals with a focus on female middle school principals. This chapter describes the methodology and techniques the researcher used to replicate the study and also delineates the specific steps followed to conduct this research.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Due to the limited research regarding the female middle school principal, the purpose of the study is to explore the nature of the leadership experiences of three female middle school principals and their perceptions of school leadership as they function within a male-dominated social construct. This research contributes to the understanding of secondary female principals, specifically the female middle school principal, in an effort to broaden the knowledge base that exists and gain an enhanced understanding of what it is like to be a female middle school principal. This study provides a different perspective of the middle school principalship—a female perspective.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Stake (1995) states that there are two types of research questions that provide direction for a case study—issue questions and topical questions. Issue questions help identify the major concerns of the study while topical questions provide additional

supportive information. These questions may take the form of an overarching question that is supported by subquestions. Based upon the primary purpose of this study, the following overarching question guides this research:

1. What is the nature of leadership experiences of Anglo female middle school principals in a male-dominated arena?

In an effort to gain supporting evidence for the overarching question, the following subquestions were addressed:

- a. In what way do female middle school principals interpret and interact with societal constructions of leadership based on gender role expectations?
- b. What are the perspectives on leadership provided by Anglo female middle school principals, and how do these contribute to new understandings or theories of leadership?

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design is the logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of a study (Yin, 1989). Therefore a multiple case study design was used following qualitative research guidelines. A qualitative approach was selected for the following reasons: according to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), qualitative research (1) occurs in the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument; (2) is descriptive; (3) is concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products; (4) analyzes data inductively; and (5) “Meaning” is of essential concern (p. 27-29). Qualitative methodology also allows

for in-depth and detailed study of a phenomenon. Thus, this study provides the opportunity to gather the thick, rich, descriptive data that adequately depicts the unique experiences of these women (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In order to accurately document the experiences of the female middle school principal, a naturalistic inquiry approach was used. “In education, qualitative research is called *naturalistic* because the researcher hangs around where the events he or she is interested in naturally occur” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 3). Most of the data collected for this study was gathered through interviews and observations took place at the campus locations where the research participants work.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that qualitative methods are more adaptable when dealing with multiple realities. The multiple realities presented in this study are that of the three female middle school principals, on three different campuses in three different school districts. Qualitative data was gathered through interviews and observations. The interviews included individual in-depth interviews with each of the participants and one focus group interview with all three participants. Observations were conducted during the three site visits to each campus and were noted in the field notes research journal. It is through these qualitative methods that the researcher gained a deeper understanding of what is like to be a female middle school principal in a male-dominated social construct.

A multiple case study approach was chosen because case studies are “...useful where one needs to understand some special people, particular problem or unique situation in great depth...” (Patton, 1990). The “particular people” chosen for this study

are Anglo females who were working as middle school principals. Three principals were chosen because it represents a manageable number for the researcher and provides a variety of stories from an Anglo perspective. While these three principals may not be representative of all female principals because of their uniqueness, they are still the voices of female middle school principals.

## **SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS AND ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Purposeful Sampling**

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants of this study. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth (Patton, 1990). Three types of purposeful sampling were employed to select the participants for this study: intensity sampling, homogeneous sampling, and convenience sampling.

Intensity sampling was used to allow the researcher to choose information-rich cases that present the phenomenon of interest. Homogeneous sampling was used to narrow the focus of the study to principals who are Anglo, female, and who were working as middle school principals. Homogeneous sampling allowed the researcher to describe this particular subgroup in greater depth. Lastly, convenience sampling was used, even though it is the most common and least desirable type of sampling. Convenience sampling allows the researcher to do “what’s fast and convenient” (Patton, 1990, p. 180), but could yield poor data. Therefore, convenience sampling was the last component considered when selecting sites and participants. Convenience sampling

allowed the researcher to select districts within a fifty mile area of one another. This allowed the participants the opportunity to meet face-to-face for the focus group interview.

### **Individual Participants**

The unit of analysis for this study is the Anglo female middle school principal. Three individuals were selected for this study using homogeneous and purposeful sampling, described in the previous section. Each of the selected principals met the following criteria:

- Be of Anglo ethnicity.
- Served as a campus administrator for a minimum of three years, either as the principal or as an assistant principal.
- Served in their current assignment as the principal for at least one year on a campus rated as least “Academically Acceptable.”

The participants were selected from three districts, which were chosen based on the criteria listed in the next section.

### **The Districts**

In order to provide a varied sampling of school districts, one small, one medium, and one large size district was selected for this research. The three districts selected for this study met the following criteria:

- A small district with less than 10,000 students was selected.
- A medium size district with over 20,000 students but less than 60,000 students was selected.

- A large district with more than 60,000 students was selected.
- One principal from each of these districts was contacted.
- In addition to the variations in student population, each district selected for this study was required to have the state classification of at least acceptable according to the Texas Education Agency's standards as measured by student performance, attendance, and drop-out rates.

### **The Schools**

The secondary focus of this study is at the middle school level. Therefore, the schools selected for this study were middle schools that met the following criteria:

- Each school had a rating of at least acceptable according to TEA.
- Contained students in grades 6, 7, and 8.

### **DATA GATHERING STEPS**

Initial data was generated using TEA's 2002-2003 Texas School Directory to generate three lists. The first list included all female middle school principals in the State of Texas. The second list included Texas school districts that had at least an acceptable rating. The third list contained the names of specific middle school campuses that had at least an acceptable rating. The list of female principals was cross-referenced with the campus list and school district list in order to identify female principals whose campus and district fell within the acceptable to exemplary range. Those who were identified as meeting the criteria were divided into small, medium, and large size districts.

Purposeful sampling and convenience sampling was used to select participants for this study.

The researcher made initial contact with each district headquarters by phone and determined research admittance protocol. Once permission was granted at the district level for this study, the researcher made contact with the female middle school principals by phone. A formal letter was sent to the principals who were contacted by phone to document the request for their participation in the research study.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

In qualitative studies in education, it is common to use only one or two techniques to collect data (Merriam, 1998). “The best known representatives of qualitative research...are participant observation and in-depth interviewing” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 2). The data collection strategies used for this research included both of these methods with the addition of field notes.

### **Interviews**

The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is on someone else’s mind (Patton, 1990). There are three types of interviews to consider: unstructured or informal interviews, semistructured interviews, and highly structured or open ended interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1989). The purpose of interviewing was to gain qualitative data from those who are experiencing the phenomenon of being a female middle school principal firsthand. To adequately obtain the experiences and perspectives of these principals, two individual interviews took place. These interviews were in-depth open-ended interviews that took place one-on-one with each participant. The interviews took place at the participant’s campus during

the researcher's site visits. The questions for these interviews can be found in the Appendix.

There was also one focus group interview that took place after all of the site visits and individual interviews were completed. This interview was held in a central location where all three participants could participate and meet each other. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) tell us:

A detailed set of procedures is usually not formed prior to data collection. Qualitative researchers avoid going into a study with hypotheses to test or specific questions to answer. They believe that shaping the questions should be one of the products of data collection rather than assumed a priori. The study itself structures the research, not preconceived ideas or any precise research design. Their work is inductive (p. 49).

All interviews lasted one to one and a half hours. Bogdan and Biklen (1982), Merriam (1998), and Patton (1990) recommend the use of tape recording to effectively record interview data. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed. In order to ensure trustworthiness of the collected data, the transcribed interviews were provided to the principals for their review and input, also known as member checking.

### **Observations**

Observations were made during the researcher's three site visits to each of the selected principals' campuses, for a total of nine campus visits over a four month period. Each visit to the campus was for the entire day including any before or after school meetings. The goal of the site visits was to provide the researcher an opportunity to



closely shadow the principal in order to experience what it is like to be the leader of the school, to gain an understanding of the climate and culture of the campus, and to receive firsthand observation of the identified phenomenon.

### **Field Notes**

Field notes were maintained by the researcher in a research journal in order to provide an avenue for documenting observations, anecdotes, quotes, questions, and other musings deemed significant throughout the study. The researcher's personal thoughts and reflections were recorded in the researcher's journal. These observational field notes provided evidence of on-going data collection and were analyzed by the researcher for emerging themes and patterns. Lincoln and Guba (1985) list the advantages of field notes as (1) being less threatening to the respondents, (2) keeping the researcher alert and responsive, (3) not subjected to technical difficulties as with audio or video taping, (4) ready access to the researcher who may want to return to a particular incident to discuss with the respondent, and (5) allowing the researcher to record her own thoughts or insights (p. 241).

### **Researcher as Instrument**

In conducting qualitative research, the researcher is considered a primary instrument for gathering data (Patton, 1990). According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), "the instrument of choice in naturalistic inquiry is the human" (p. 236). As the researcher conducted the interviews and observations, she could not help but become part of the research—as the research was gathered through her own lens, was

transcribed, and interpreted. As transcripts were transcribed, the researcher's feelings, opinions, and viewpoints may find their way into the translation.

### **Subjectivity**

There is no doubt that research is value laden. It is Lincoln and Guba (1985) who said values can and do influence inquiry. In qualitative research, it is important to have an understanding of the bias of the researcher. The bias or "lens" the researcher views the world through is that of a female administrator. The researcher has previously worked as a kindergarten teacher, a mentor for first year teachers, a supervisor of student teachers, an elementary school assistant principal, and a central office administrator. The researcher currently works as the director of human resources in a rural school district. Therefore, the researcher found this study of female leaders to be of great interest to her own career and seeks to gain a better understanding of future endeavors in moving up the administrative career ladder.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The process of data analysis commenced with the transcription of the audiotapes after each individual interview and the focus group interview. The interviews were transcribed as soon as possible following the site visit in order to maintain the credibility of the data. The transcription was provided to the participant for member checking, with any corrections made by the researcher as soon as possible to ensure trustworthiness of the data.

This transcription was then organized and coded using the qualitative computer software known as NVIVO. While the NVIVO software assisted with organizing the

data and coding the basic themes, it did not do the analysis for the researcher. The researcher was responsible for identifying more specific themes or codes known as “nodes” and for analyzing and drawing conclusions from the data.

The researcher’s journal was also be transcribed, read, and reviewed by the researcher. This data was also processed using NVIVO and fell into themes previously identified in the interview data.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, it is imperative that the data be trustworthy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) tell us that there must be confidence that the findings have truth, value, applicability in other contexts with other subjects, consistency, and neutrality. The four components of trustworthiness are internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Member checks and triangulation were used in this study to establish the internal validity of the findings to see if they matched reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Member checks were used to allow the research participants the opportunity to review the data and request any changes or corrections. Triangulation was also used to allow “multiple perceptions to clarify meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 443); in the case of this study, the interviews, the researcher’s observations, and the field notes from the researcher’s journal contributed to the triangulation process.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter was designed to describe the methodology and techniques used to gather the necessary data for this research. It includes the design of this multiple case study, the criteria used to select the site and participants for this research, and an explanation of the qualitative methods that were used to gather and analyze data. An understanding of these methods will help the reader interpret the data presented in Chapter V and the conclusions and recommendations of Chapter VI.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH CONTEXTS AND PROFILES OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a vivid image of the three participants selected for this study and includes a thorough description of the middle schools and school districts in which they work. Throughout the data gathering process, anonymity was a concern of one of the participants. Although it is common practice to assign pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants when conducting research, additional precautionary measures were used to protect the identity of the participants in this research project. In addition to assigning pseudonyms to each person, school, and district, this research does not make any associations between the participant and any particular school or district. Nor is any school connected to any one district; therefore, each principal, school, and district are described as a stand alone indicator. Because there are fewer women than men in the position of the middle school principal and because of the small number of middle schools that exist within school districts categorized as “small” and “medium” size, it would not be difficult to identify these women without this double-blind anonymity.

#### **Procedure**

Over a four month period, each principal participant was shadowed by the researcher on three separate occasions. The researcher arrived on campus before 7:30 a.m. and remained with each principal until at least until 5:00 p.m. during each of the

nine visits. Throughout the campus visits, field notes were maintained by the researcher to document the manner in which the principals interacted with students, staff members, district officials, and community stakeholders. The principals were observed in various settings and situations both formal and informal as they conducted their day-to-day school business. The observations took place both on and off campus including before and after school hours.

In addition to shadowing the principals on several occasions, two open-ended interviews were held with each principal during the four month period. The first individual interview occurred at the beginning of the data gathering process and utilized a predetermined set of questions, which are included in Appendix A. Questions for the second interview were created as a result of the researcher's analysis of the participants' responses received in the first interview, as well as other musings that evolved from the researcher's subsequent campus visits. At the conclusion of the nine shadowing experiences, the three principals met one another in person and participated in a focus group discussion, wherein the researcher served as the facilitator.

### **Selection Process**

The participants included in this study are three purposefully selected Anglo females who were working as middle school principals in the State of Texas. Each participant had at least one year of experience in their current position as principal. In addition to the principal selection criteria, their campuses and districts had to have an "Academically Acceptable" rating according to the TEA accountability rating system. One principal was selected from a large district with more than 60,000 students in an

urban area. One principal was selected from a medium size district of 20,000-60,000 students in a suburban area. One principal was selected from a small size district of less than 10,000 students in a rural area.

Due to the significant number of middle schools situated in an urban district and several female principals who met the selection criteria, an urban participant was easily identified. The rural participant was also easily identified due to the opposite effect that many small school districts had only one middle school campus to consider. Because there are more men than women at the middle school principalship, many small districts were quickly eliminated in the selection process based on the gender of the middle school principal. Once a female middle school principal was found in a small rural district, then the other selection criterion could be examined.

Locating the third participant from a medium size district proved to be a more difficult task. The medium size districts were not eliminated as quickly by only looking at only one school. Medium size districts typically had several middle schools and usually had more than one female serving in the principalship. The difficulty arose in that many female middle school principals from medium size districts met four of the six criteria while fewer of them met five out of the six criteria. No principals were found who matched all six of the criteria that were located within a convenient distance to the other two participants selected. The “convenience” criteria outlined in Chapter Three became an overriding issue in order to have all three participants join together for the final focus group discussion. The third participant who was eventually chosen met five of the six criteria but had not yet completed a full year in her current position as

principal. This participant was chosen with the consideration that she would meet all six of the criteria by the time the research project was completed.

To control some of the variables in finding three quality, comparable participants, the researcher tried to match student demographics across the three settings for possible similarities in the participants' work environments. All three schools had at least 40% minority student population. While the student populations and work environments were somewhat similar, the three participants proved to be very unique individuals—each had her own background experiences, career path, years of experience, personality, and leadership style. Regardless of the variables the researcher controlled, these three female principals reaffirmed the difficulty that exists in generalizing the female experience of a middle school principal. Consequently, it is not the goal of this research to generalize the female experience. The story told by each of these women contributes to the limited educational research in theory and practice of what it is like to be a white female middle school principal in a male-dominated social construct.

While the profiles of the three districts, schools, and principals are indeed factual, they have been given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. In each of the following sections, the school districts, middle school campuses, and principals are described in more detail. Each topic is then summarized in a table format at the end of each section.



## **SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

This section provides a detailed description of each of the three school districts selected for this research study. The criteria used for selecting these districts include having an “Academically Acceptable” rating for the 2003-2004 school year according to the Academic Excellence Indicator System of the Texas Education Agency and having districts that are considered small, medium, and large according to student enrollment numbers.

### **Westview Independent School District**

The Westview Independent School District represents the large size district in this study. It is an urban school district with over 100 campuses that serve 80,000 students. The district employs 11,000 professional and support personnel, and operates on a budget of \$730 million dollars per year.

The district has twelve high schools, seventeen middle schools, and over seventy elementary schools. Coinciding with the national trend, the majority of the district’s high school principals are men and the majority of its elementary principals are women. Contrary to the national trend where 70% of middle school principals are male, Westview ISD’s middle school principals are predominantly female. Ten of the seventeen middle school principals in the district (59%) are women.

The district is led by a male superintendent who has completed three years on the job was recently given an additional three years on his contract. Over \$500 million dollars was overwhelmingly approved by the district’s taxpayers in the most recent bond election. This victory was greatly attributed to the popularity of the superintendent. The

bond money will be used to build eight new schools and provide renovations and upgrades to campuses across the district.

The district's central office was reorganized last year into elementary, middle school, and high school levels. Each level is led by an associate superintendent, all of whom are female. The associate superintendent who oversees the middle schools is an Anglo female who has been employed in the district for two years.

According to the State's accountability measures, Westview ISD is an academically acceptable district. It has seven exemplary elementary campuses, 16 recognized campuses (one high school, one middle school, and 14 elementary schools), and 74 academically acceptable campuses at all levels. The district also has six academically unacceptable campuses (one high school, one middle school, three elementary schools, and one alternative site). It is a minority majority district with a diverse student population of 55% Hispanic, 29% White, 13% African American, and 3% Asian.

### **Valley Ridge Independent School District**

Valley Ridge Independent School District was selected to serve as the medium size district. It is a suburban district surrounded by several other suburban districts and one urban district. The district has a total of 4,700 employees, about half of whom are professional employees. The district's student population consists of 62% White, 20% Hispanic, 9% African American, and 9% other, which includes a significant Asian population. During the last five years, the student population has increased over 20%.

This growing school district operates on a \$225 million dollar budget. The school district's most recent bond election did not pass.

The superintendent's position was occupied by the same man for the past six years; however, not long after the failed bond election, this superintendent resigned and was employed by another district. The superintendency remained vacant for many months with an interim from within assigned until a new superintendent is named. It is a district in the midst of several leadership changes.

This suburban district serves over 37,000 students on 42 campuses. There are four high schools, eight middle schools, twenty-seven elementary schools, and two alternative centers. Three of the four high schools (75%) are lead by men, which is consistent with national high school principal trends. However, six of the eight middle schools (75%) are lead by women which contradicts the national trend of males dominating the middle school principalship. There are 27 elementary schools, with 22 female principals (81%) and 5 male principals. The district is divided into four "learning communities" that are lead by the four associate superintendents, two males and two females. Each learning community consists of a vertical team of elementary schools, middle schools, and one high school.

Valley Ridge ISD is an academically acceptable district, according to the State's accountability measures. There are four exemplary elementary campuses, twenty recognized campuses (including one high school and one middle school), and sixteen academically acceptable campuses at all levels. Valley Ridge ISD has no academically unacceptable campuses.

## **Spencer Independent School District**

The Spencer Independent School District, located in a rural area of Texas, represents the small size district in this study. It is one of the fastest growing areas in the state and has averaged 10% growth in student population per year over the past four years. It is a district that spans over 200 square miles and encompasses five small communities. Spencer currently has fourteen campuses for its 7,300 students. Spencer ISD lies along a major interstate highway and is within one hour of several suburban and urban districts both to its north and south. The district's most recent bond election was passed, allowing over \$80 million dollars for the renovation of existing campuses and to build three new campuses in the very near future.

Spencer ISD is led by a male superintendent who is new to the district. The two positions directly below the superintendent are also occupied by males. However, 85% of the campus principals in this district are females. Due to the district's rapid growth, a second high school campus opened last year with a female middle school principal promoted from within to lead the new high school. Spencer ISD has three middle schools, all of which are led by female principals. Of the seven elementary schools, six are led by females (86%) and only one is led by a male. There are only two male principals in the district, one at the original high school and one at an elementary school.

According to the State's accountability measures for 2004, Spencer ISD has one recognized middle school and two recognized elementary schools. All other schools in the district are rated academically acceptable. There are no exemplary or academically

unacceptable campuses. The overall district rating for Spencer ISD is academically acceptable.

The following table provides a summary of the three school districts featured in this research study.

**Table 4.1**

**School District Profiles**

District Name	Type	# of Students	Student Demographics	# of F. MS Prin	# of M. MS Prin	# of F. princ in District	# of M. princ in district	District Rating
Westview ISD	Urban	80,000	29% White 55% Hispanic 13% Af.Amer. 3% Asian	10 (59%)	7 (41%)	75 (71%)	30 (29%)	Acceptable
Valley Ridge ISD	Suburban	37,000	62% White 20% Hispanic 9% Af. Amer. 9% Other	6 (75%)	2 (25%)	30 (75%)	10 (25%)	Acceptable
Spencer ISD	Rural	9,700	44% White 53% Hispanic 3% Af. Amer.	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	11 (85%)	2 (15%)	Acceptable

**MIDDLE SCHOOL CAMPUSES**

This section describes the three middle schools at which the research participants work. The campuses lie within the above-mentioned school districts but are described individually and not in association with any one principal or district in order to provide extra precautionary measures to protect the identity of the participants. All three middle schools encompass grades six, seven and eight. One school is located in a small, rural district; one is located in a medium, suburban district; and one is located in a large, urban district. Each middle school is described below, with Table 4.2 providing a summary of the schools at the end of this section.

## **Gateway Middle School**

Gateway Middle School is a sizeable campus that sits beside a high school. It is spacious in size and in the amount of land surrounding the building. Before school and after lunch the students at Gateway are allowed to run and play freely in the open fields adjacent to the south side of the building. The administrators and teachers believe this feature positively affects the low number of discipline referrals at this campus.

Gateway Middle School opened in 1993 as a seventh and eighth grade campus with over 850 students. Nine years later, it became an eighth grade campus serving the entire district. In 2003, Gateway was again reorganized to become the sixth, seventh and eighth grade campus that it is today with approximately 600 students. Because the campus was built to hold more students, it currently hosts the district's alternative high school students. There are no portable buildings on this campus.

The campus received an academically acceptable rating for its 2004 TAKS test and campus performance results. However, the 2004 test results show that scores have fallen slightly in four of the five tested areas in comparison to the 2003 results. With a decrease of 5% compared to last year, 78% of all students passed the Reading/ELA test. Math scores remained the same with 60% of all students passing. Over 85% of the students passed the writing test, with no comparison score from the previous year. Over 85% of the students passed the social studies exam, with a 2% decrease from the previous year. 56% of students passed all tests in 2004; this is a decrease of 2% from the previous year. This campus did meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements. While the other two campuses involved in this study seemed to focus greatly on raising

test scores, this did not seem to be a priority at Gateway. It was not a sense of complacency necessarily, but rather an absence of a sense of urgency to raise scores in comparison to the other two campuses used in this study.

Gateway Middle School does well in its athletics program and has a strong band program. It is a campus with high student involvement in the UIL Academics competition. Gateway is staffed by 50 teachers; 73% who are female and 27% who are male. The ethnicity of the teachers is 87% White, 10% Hispanic, and 3% African American while the student population is 40% White, 51% Hispanic, 8% African American, and 1% Other. Gateway has 35% of its students who are economically disadvantaged and a mobility rate of 18%.

### **Conner Middle School**

Conner Middle School is nestled alongside a neighborhood and a busy thoroughfare on the south side of the district. It is a beautifully landscaped and environmentally friendly campus that opened in 1972. The campus has a naturalist look and feel to it and includes an outdoor learning center, amphitheatre and instructional area. In the open courtyard at the center of the campus, picnic tables and a miniature fishpond are surrounded by banana trees and magnolia trees. The newest addition to the campus is the outdoor amphitheatre that seats 100 people and is used for plays, presentations, concerts, meetings, and other instructional activities. Across from the amphitheatre is the school's ROPES course. Every student at Conner Middle School goes through the Reality Oriented Physical Experiential Session course at least once during their three years at Conner. The principal and staff consider the ROPES course

to be a valuable tool in creating a campus culture of trust, respect, and safety. Conner Middle School is founded on William Glasser's Quality Schools model of five basic needs: freedom, fun, power, safety, and belonging.

Conner Middle School was the first school in the nation to join the Peaceful Schools Initiative. Other school initiatives that are supported through the Peaceful Schools Initiative include PALS/peer mediation, ROPES, Young Marines, UPWARDS (Uniting Parents With After-school Resources to Develop Student Success), and partnerships with a local university. Conner offers a strong fine arts program for its students and is one of the few middle schools in the district to have a mariachi band and jazz band. Through various grant initiatives, Conner is equipped with top quality technology which includes five technology labs with wireless laptops.

Conner has a good reputation within the district and has been identified as making adequate yearly progress (AYP) according to the No Child Left Behind Act. This means Conner will be receiving transfer students from two neighboring middle schools that did not make adequate yearly progress. Conner Middle School has an academically acceptable rating for its 2004 TAKS test and campus performance results. Nearly 80% of all students passed the Reading/ELA test, which was an increase from the previous year. Just over 60% of all students passed the mathematics test, which was a dramatic increase from the previous year. Over 85% of the students passed the writing test, up almost 10% from the previous year. 85% of the students passed the social studies exam, which was a slight increase from the previous year. Overall, the student scores increased on all tests.



The student population at Conner has changed dramatically over the past decade from a predominantly white, middle class population, to that of a Hispanic majority population. The students currently at Conner Middle School are 67% Hispanic, 22% White, 10% African American, and 1% Other. The student mobility rate is 20% while 60% of the students are economically disadvantaged. Due to the high number of economically disadvantaged student and mobility rate, only one-third of the students attending Conner Middle School in the sixth grade will graduate from Conner Middle School in the eighth grade. There are 73 teachers who serve approximately 900 students at Conner. The teachers are 70% female and 30% male with an ethnicity of 78% White, 15% Hispanic, and 7% African American.

### **Webber Middle School**

Webber Middle School is located on the southwest side of the school district and is one of the district's largest middle schools. The school opened in 1988 with over 650 students. Today, Webber has over 1200 students who come from five neighborhood elementary schools. Its two-story campus sits on a small plot of land with no space for expansion or play area for the students. Due to the rapidly growing area, several portable classroom buildings have been added to the campus site over the years.

School pride is evident on the campus at Webber. Eye-catching bulletin boards, student work, murals painted on walls, and the overall cleanliness of the buildings and grounds exude the pride and spirit of the campus. Closed circuit TV's are on in every classroom with the school name, mascot and declaration of school pride clearly

displayed. Teachers and students show their school spirit by wearing their school t-shirts; although a student dress code is strongly enforced on this campus.

The student demographics of Webber have changed dramatically since the school opened with 80% of its student population being White. Today the student population consists of 60% Anglo, with a steadily growing minority population of 20% Hispanic, 11% African American, and 9% Asian. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students has doubled during the past three years from 11% to 22%. The mobility rate of students at this campus is 12%.

According to TEA's AEIS report, Webber is an "Academically Acceptable" campus based on their 2004 TAKS test results and overall campus performance. The campus also achieved "Commended" status in the area of reading/language arts, indicating that students performed considerably above the state passing standard. Because Webber was previously a "Recognized" campus in 2003, which is a step above academically acceptable, an added sense of urgency is felt on the campus by the teachers and administrators to get their scores back to the "Recognized" level.

According to the 2004 TAKS test results, 95% all students passed the Reading/ELA, writing, and social studies tests, which was a slight increase from the previous year. Over 85% of all students passed the mathematics test, which was a 6% increase from the previous year. The students' overall scores increased on all tests and on the number of students passing all tests and the campus made adequate yearly progress according to NCLB standards.

Webber Middle School is staffed by 100 teachers with 76% female teachers and 24% male teachers. Ethnicity of the teachers is 90% White, 8% Hispanic, 1% African American, and 1% Asian.

Table 4.2, featured below, provides a summary of the three middle schools used in this research study.

**Table 4.2**

**Middle School Profiles**

Campus Name	# of Students	Campus Demographics	TEA Rating	Met AYP	# of Teachers	% Teachers w/6 or more yrs exp	Gender of Teachers
Gateway MS	600	40% White 51% Hispanic 8% Afr Amer. 1% Other 35% Eco. Dis. 18% Mobility	Acceptable	Yes	50	63%	73% female 27% male
Conner MS	920	22% White 67% Hispanic 10% Afr Amer. 1% Other 60% Eco. Dis. 20% Mobility	Acceptable	Yes	73	77%	70% female 30% male
Webber MS	1200	63% White 17% Hispanic 12% Afr Amer. 8% Other 20% Eco. Dis. 12% Mobility	Acceptable	Yes	110	63%	76% female 24% male

## **THE PARTICIPATING PRINCIPALS**

The three participants selected for this study have at least three years of administrative experience either as a principal or assistant principal at the middle school level. Two of the participants were working in their first principalship assignment. Of these two women, one was the assistant principal for six years and the principal for six years at the same school. The other of these two women was completing her first year as the principal at the school where she had previously served as the assistant principal for a period of five years. The third participant has been the principal at her current campus for two years, but has worked in several other districts as both a middle school and high school principal and assistant principal. The following section provides a narrative description of each of the three principal participants and is followed by a summary of their profiles in Table 4.3 at the end of this section.

### **Lauren Mansfield**

Lauren Mansfield is 35 years old, married, and does not have any children. She is a smart, sharply dressed, no-nonsense individual. This petite, business-like woman exudes professionalism and her presence commands the respect of all whom she encounters. She is well versed in the district's curriculum as well as the latest research in best practices. She has high expectations of her staff and students, and expects nothing less than perfection of herself. Her neatly kept office contains bookshelves stacked with the most recent publications on topics such as curriculum, collaboration, learning communities, and the middle school principalship.

Lauren just recently completed her first year as a middle school principal. It has been a difficult year for her and one she touts in her own words to be “a great learning experience.” Lauren’s administrative career began six years ago when she became the assistant principal in a nearby town. Following that experience, Lauren became the assistant principal at her current campus. Lauren spent five years as an assistant principal at her current school and was then promoted to the principalship mid-year. Although she knew the students, their parents, and the community well, she never imagined there would be such a big learning curve between the two positions.

Anyone who encounters Lauren will quickly notice her refined inquiry skills. She has a knack for turning conversations into a series of questions. This strength is used to help all involved parties delve deeper into their thoughts and actions. Lauren is known for asking tough questions. Although Lauren takes herself and her job very seriously, she possesses a sharp sense of humor. This was evidenced by her quick comments, laughter, and opportunities to poke fun at herself.

Lauren was born in a large urban city in Texas but grew up in a small town in east Texas. She comes from a family of four children, with two older brothers and one younger brother. Lauren’s intelligence was evidenced by her early completion of high school requirements. Although there was no high school plan that allowed her to graduate early, she was allowed to begin college coursework at the age of sixteen. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Southwest Texas State University and became certified to teach secondary language arts. Lauren taught language arts at the middle

school level for six years. It was during this time as a teacher that her male principal encouraged her to consider becoming a school administrator.

Lauren took a few classes in educational administration and found the coursework to be intriguing. Within a short period of time, she earned a masters degree in Educational Administration from Mary Hardin Baylor University. She then became a middle school assistant principal for one year in another district before obtaining the assistant principalship at her current campus five years ago.

Lauren has spent her first year as the principal establishing positive relationships with all stakeholders and shaking things up on her campus. Lauren indicated that her greatest challenge since assuming the principalship was to help her teachers feel better about themselves and what they were doing for kids. The sign on Lauren's bookshelf reads, "Because nice matters." Lauren feels it is important to be nice to the teachers and to let them know she appreciates the hard work they are doing.

As the new principal, Lauren has faced many challenges. Her administrative team consists of two new assistant principals—one male and one female—who are not only new to her campus, but new to school administration. She hired three new counselors—two who are new to the district and school, and one who is brand new to the counseling profession. In addition, Lauren hired forty new teachers over the summer. She attributes this high turnover rate to marriages, births of children, in-district promotions, and to the closing loophole in the social security laws that would affect some of her retirement-age teachers.

Lauren is married, but does not have children. She jokes that this works well for her since she arrives at school at 6:30 a.m. and goes home at 6:30 p.m. Her husband often teases her about her long hours and will say, “Don’t forget to pick up the kids on your way home!” Lauren’s mantra throughout the research project was, “I don’t know how anyone can do this job and have children!” (Mansfield FN 1:219-220). Lauren is hopeful that the long hours are simply due to it being her first year as a principal and that the time demands will decrease slightly with each year.

First and foremost, Lauren considers herself an instructional leader. She estimated that 85% of her time at school is focused on being that instructional leader.

I’m either in the classroom or visiting with that teacher about where they are with curriculum or where the kids are and making sure that there is a system in place for the kids (Mansfield Interview #2, 222-224).

Lauren is the third principal in the history of her campus. She was preceded by a female principal and by the male principal who opened the school. She believes that being a principal is all about being collaborative.

Always exploring what it is that we can do better collectively...so that we can improve the campus. We are all learning together (Mansfield Interview #1, 31-33; 35).

Lauren mentioned that in the future, she would like to work at the district level as a curriculum person. She said that she might also consider the superintendency program at some point in the future.

## **Barbara Anderson**

This is Barbara Anderson's second stop at her current campus. Several years ago Barbara served one year as an assistant principal on this campus. This time, she is the principal, where she has been for the past two years. Because her husband was a football coach, they moved often. Therefore, Barbara has worked in many different school districts across Texas. She has been a principal and assistant principal at both the high school and middle school levels and has over 22 years experience as an administrator. After completing the coursework for her doctorate degree, Barbara worked in a large district in south Texas as a central office administrator. Now that her husband has retired, Barbara would like to finish out her career in her current district.

Barbara is forty-seven years old and does not have any children. She taught at the elementary level as a kindergarten teacher for four and a half years. After three of those years, she followed the lead of her female principal and started working towards her master's degree. Upon completion of her master's degree, Barbara decided to continue her graduate studies and pursue a Ph.D. while she felt she was still in the "career mode." She received her doctorate in educational administration in 1987 from the University of Texas.

Barbara is the fifth principal of her campus, following two male and two female principals. Her friendly and inviting demeanor sets the climate for her campus. Her visibility in the hallways has become a tradition and her salutation of, "Good Mornin'" to everyone she encounters sets the tone for a great day.



Barbara has a no-frills appearance, wears little to no makeup, and dresses in a casual manner. She shows her school spirit by wearing polo style t-shirts with the school name and logo on it. Barbara conducts herself in a matter-of-fact manner as she moves around the building and in and out of classrooms in a quiet, yet noble way. Barbara can be found in the hallways interacting with students and teachers during the passing periods throughout the day. Her interactions with staff members are friendly and relaxed, speckled with many occasions of humor and laughter.

Although Barbara has only been in the district two years, her leadership is evidenced by her involvement in many campus level and district level committees. She served on the superintendent's cabinet as the representative for the district's principals. Barbara believes that as a principal, her job is, "to surround myself with the best people and then guide and support their efforts (Anderson Interview #1, 44-46.) She upholds this belief in her actions as she guides and supports her staff. During the campus visits, it was obvious that Barbara's staff had a sense of autonomy and that Barbara was simply their guide. Barbara is the type of leader that remains calm in all situations and appeared to be the sounding board for her staff members.

Of the three participants, Barbara disclosed the least about herself and her personal life. A bit on the quiet side, Barbara seemed slightly guarded in how much she was willing to reveal about herself. She was, however, steadfast throughout the research project in her belief that gender does not matter, "...Whether we're male or whether we're female, our job is that we help youngsters to become better individuals" (Anderson Interview #1, 375-376).

## **Allison Frost**

Allison Frost has been a principal for the past six years. As a matter of fact, all of Allison's professional experience (except her first year as a teacher) has been at the same campus. Allison was previously an assistant principal at this school for a period of five years before moving up to the principalship. She has witnessed a change in demographics at her campus during the twelve years she has been here. Although the area of the town where Allison's school is located is growing, her teaching staff was reduced by four teachers last year due to the district's budget constraints. Allison recanted how painful it was for her to cut four teachers from her staff. Her campus has very little turnover, something Allison attributes to her love of the staff.

Allison has worked sixteen of her seventeen professional years in the same district at the same campus. She began her teaching career as a teacher in another city. Allison then taught ten years of vocational homemaking at her current school and was selected as the district's teacher of the year during that time. After her second child was born, Allison decided to become a stay-at-home mom. During this time, she continued to further her education. Allison already had a master's degree in psychology, but did not want to "go cold" while away from her profession; therefore, she started her second master's degree, which was in educational administration.

While out of the classroom and a stay-at-home mom, Allison remained heavily involved as a room parent and PTA president at her sons' school. Once her boys were in middle school, Allison applied for and received the assistant principal's position at her current campus. She served six years as the assistant principal and had no desire to

become a principal until her sons were out of high school. This stemmed from concern for her sons and not wanting to cause embarrassment to them if she or her school had gotten on the front page of the newspaper for doing something wrong. Allison applied for the principalship, and much to her surprise, she received the position. By this time, her eldest son had graduated from high school and her younger son was a senior. She is currently serving her sixth year as the principal and plans to remain there until she retires in three years.

Allison Frost is a 55-year-old Anglo female, the youngest of three children born to her parents. Her parents passed away during her teenage years, which created a special need in her life to keep her husband and sons close at heart. Allison is a wife, mother, and grandmother. Her face lights up when asked about any of these roles she serves or when asked about the loved ones in her life. Allison repeatedly stresses the importance of family. She points out the turtle in her office who sings the lyrics, “You’ve gotta slow down,” a gift given to her by the faculty of her school. She often quotes a plaque hanging on her wall about the delicate balance between self, work, family, and spirituality. While Allison quotes these ideals religiously, she is the first to admit how difficult it has been for her to maintain a healthy balance in her life.

Allison is a social butterfly who never meets a stranger. She greets people with a wholesome, genuine smile and offers a hug to everyone she knows. To say she is “a talker” is an understatement. Allison is an open book with nothing to hide. She is every researcher’s dream research subject. She answered all questions asked of her and willingly shared her thoughts, ideas, questions, musings, and philosophies about

leadership and life. Allison is that special type of person who makes others feel special and taken care of. She nurtures and mothers her staff and students alike and tells them as well as her colleagues that she loves them on a regular basis. The words “I love you” are Allison’s special way of closing many conversations throughout the day.

To Allison, the most important thing is that people know she truly cares about them. She considers her students as her family; and she loves them unconditionally. Allison is greatly respected by her students, staff, community, central office, and her colleagues and is highly involved at the district level. She has served as president of the administrator’s organization, as well as several other district level committees. Her stability and knowledge of how things work in the district are highly regarded by others. Everyone in the district and community knows that they can count on Allison Frost.

Allison describes herself and her leadership style as collaborative and likes being a problem solver. This is evidenced in everything she does, from conversations to decision-making. Her “can-do” attitude is contagious and sets the climate for her campus. Allison believes that being a principal is not about power; it’s about having a heart and caring about people. “You’ve got to want to be in the business because you want to make a difference for kids and parents and the community” (Frost Interview #1, 365-366).

The following table provides a summary of the profiles of the principals selected for this study.

**Table 4.3****Participant Profiles**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Years Teaching Exper.</b>	<b>Teacher Certification</b>	<b>Administrative Certification</b>	<b>Years AP Experience</b>	<b>Years Principal Experience</b>	<b>Years Central office experience</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Children</b>
Lauren Mansfield	B.S. M. Ed Admin	5	Elementary 1-8; Reading 1-8	Mid-Management	5	1	0	35	Married	No
Barbara Anderson	Ph.D. Ed Admin	4 ½	PreK – K; Elementary 1-8; Reading Specialist	Mid-Management & Superintendent	6	10	6 ½	47	Married	No
Allison Frost	Master s in Ed Psych & Ed Admin	11	Family Consumer Science 6-12	Mid-Management	6	6	0	55	Divorced and Remarried	Yes (2 grown sons)

## **THE PATH TO THE MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP**

From the interviews with the participants emerged the stories of their professional paths to the middle school principalship. The career paths of these three participants is congruent with the literature of Ortiz (1982), Crutcher (1992), and Browne-Ferrigno (2204), which says that it takes females longer to reach the same rank as men. This section describes how and why each participant became a middle school principal. It also includes the training and characteristics they believe are necessary to be a good middle school principal.

Allison Frost had the most years of experience as a classroom teacher in comparison to the other two participants. She taught vocational homemaking classes at the middle school level for eleven years before deciding to stay at home with her two sons for the next eleven years. While Allison was a stay-at-home mom, she simultaneously pursued her administrative certification. When she decided her children were independent enough not to need her at home full time, she was able to reenter the education profession as an assistant principal. Allison considered herself very fortunate to become an assistant principal at the same campus where she formerly taught. Allison served as the assistant principal for six years before becoming the principal at the same campus. From the time Allison entered the education profession as a teacher until the time she became the principal of a middle school campus, 28 years had elapsed. Allison has been the principal at her campus for six years.

Barbara Anderson's career path to the principalship took the shortest amount of time in comparison with the other participants in this study. She began her teaching

career at the elementary level teaching fourth grade for three years. Then she taught kindergarten for a year and a half. It was during her third year of teaching that Barbara's female principal encouraged her to continue her education by attaining a master degree. Barbara quickly earned her masters degree and began working as a central office administrator for the next four and a half years. It was during this time in central office that Barbara pursued and earned her doctoral degree. After four and a half years in central office, Barbara realized that central office was not the place she wanted to spend the rest of her career. It was at that time Barbara became an assistant principal at the middle school and high school level in various school districts. Barbara has a total of six years experience as an assistant principal. Following her experience as an assistant principal, Barbara became a principal; an event that occurred fifteen years after she entered the teaching profession. Barbara has ten years of experience as a principal at the middle school and high school levels in various school districts in Texas.

Lauren Mansfield is the youngest of the three participants and has the least amount of experience in the education profession. She began her teaching career as a language arts teacher at the middle school level and taught five years before beginning her masters degree to become an assistant principal. Lauren served as an assistant principal for one year in a different district before being hired as the assistant principal at her current campus. She worked four years as the assistant principal and was then hired to be the principal. She began her new assignment mid-year and is currently completing her first year as the principal. Lauren's career path to the principalship entailed ten years from the time she entered the teaching profession. Although she has the least

amount of total years of experience in the education profession, Lauren's journey to the principalship was the quickest of the three participants.

### **Why They Became Middle School Principals**

All three participants reported that they became middle school principals because they enjoy working with middle school aged students and that they have a real "knack" for this age group. The participants appreciated the higher-level conversations of middle school students and each commented on how much fun it is to work with this age of children and that these students have a great sense of humor. Barbara summed it up best when she said, "Every day with the kids is just hilarious and I just find great pleasure in being around them" (Anderson, Focus Group, 213-214).

All three women mentioned the positive aspect of having a broader impact on students and families as a middle school administrator, versus remaining a classroom teacher. Barbara's classroom experience was at the kindergarten level, although she has been an administrator at the middle school and high school level. Allison and Lauren taught at the middle school level and neither had considered becoming an administrator until their male principals encouraged them. According to Banks (2000, citing Gross & Trask 1976), it is common for women to move into administrative positions at the urging of someone else who is typically a male administrator; while men go into administration for financial reasons (Ortiz 1982).



## **Training for the Job**

Being a middle school principal requires specialized training that includes teaching experience, an administrative internship, a master's degree, and principal certification. Each of the participants meets these requirements and one even holds a doctoral degree in educational administration. While each felt that this specialized training provided a foundation for the fundamentals of being a middle school principal, they also believed that on-the-job training was just as critical. Allison summed it up best with the comment:

You can get all the degrees you want to but then there is OJT—on-the-job training—and there are just things that classrooms are never going to teach you...you can study all about management, but until you actually manage....nothing takes the place of experience (Frost interview #1, 426-430).

Lauren, the youngest of the three and the one who most recently completed her administrative training, offered this insight regarding the preparation she received:

It (the university prep program) probably gave me some foundation of leadership styles, but I don't know that it helped me as a female leader ....The university, I don't think, differentiated between the female role versus the male role. It was more of a generalist type of approach (Mansfield Interview #1, 55-64).

The three principals agreed that nothing can completely prepare you for the job of being a middle school principal. They seemed to have resolved themselves to this notion as being the nature of the principalship specifically and perhaps the nature of the education profession in general.

## **Characteristics Needed for the Job**

Most books on leadership include a laundry list of characteristics needed to be successful. The participants had their own list. While they agreed that being a well-rounded individual with “thick skin” was important, they also reported that there were specific characteristics such as flexibility, a sense of humor, being a good listener and instructional leader, and being able to balance everything nicely that one needed in order to be a successful middle school principal.

### Flexibility

The ability to be flexible and “go with the flow” were specific characteristics that continuously emerged from the data. Each of the participants was observed exercising flexibility, as it was common for them to have interruptions from students, teachers and parents throughout their day. Even though there were scheduled appointments on their daily calendars, they would rearrange those schedules to go by classrooms where teachers or substitutes were experiencing difficulties, cover lunch duty or recess when staff was short-handed, handle discipline problems such as bomb threats and weapons being brought onto campus, attend to graffiti both inside and outside the building, meet with vendors who drop by such as the defibrillator installer, and deal with whatever other issue arose.

Barbara mentioned that it is important not only being flexible with the students, but with the teachers as well.

Letting kids know that we're here. We have real high expectations of them but also giving them the flexibility as well as the teachers the flexibility to achieve and be successful at levels that are a challenge of them and a challenge to them (Anderson Interview #1, 58-61).

### Sense of Humor

Lauren mentioned the importance of having a sense of humor and not taking things personally. Her keen sense of humor was evidenced during one of the site visits when her name, along with some profane obscenities about her, had been graffitied onto the boys' bathroom stall. Lauren laughed out loud, poked fun at herself, and commented on how proud she was of the students to keep a rumor about her going for so many years (Mansfield, FN, 3:49-54). Barbara's sharp sense of humor was observed on each of the site visits as she joked around with her staff members. On Fridays during football season, her campus hosted "spirit day." During one of the site visits, it was "Crazy Hair Day" and Barbara was observed joking with the teachers and students who participated in the event. She made sure their pictures were taken, printed, and posted in the hallways for all to see, which seemed to create an atmosphere of fun on her campus. (Anderson, FN, 1:20-23).

In the focus group discussion, Barbara and Allison emphasized the importance of having fun with the students.

I'm at a point where every day with the kids is just hilarious and I just find great pleasure in being around them (Anderson, Focus Group, 213-214).

### Good Listener

The participants reported that being a good listener was also an important characteristic to have as a middle school principal. Lauren elaborated that being a good listener also included being able to ask good questions and to have the ability to see “the big picture.”

...To listen and then ask good questions so that you can pull answers and get to the root cause of whatever their concern is because truly, people are coming to you with ways to approach whatever it be, curriculum or student or a classroom or even the bell schedule, they are looking for ways to make it the best and do the best for them. They are not thinking whole picture. So you have to figure out a way to see the whole big picture and how it's going to impact everyone but still address that individual's needs and make them feel supported. (Mansfield Interview #1, 312-319).

Throughout the research study, it became obvious that Lauren's forte was her ability to ask good questions. . On numerous occasions when Lauren's staff members would stop by her office to ask her questions, she would turn their questions back around to them for self reflection. She even did this several times to the researcher during the site visits and interviews; she was lightheartedly reminded that she was the one being interviewed (Mansfield, FN, 1:117-120). It was also common to hear Lauren refine her listening skills by repeating back to the person, “What I heard you say was...” (Mansfield, FN, 3:61-62).

Allison was also observed exhibiting good listening skills. She has a practice of meeting with each new student and his/her parent(s) at the moment they enroll into her

campus. She shares basic information with the family along with her leadership philosophy but then asks the family to share their expectations and goals for the student. She showed great skill in getting families to talk while she attentively listened (Frost, FN 2: 5-15).

### Instructional Leader

All three participants viewed themselves as instructional leaders on their campus and believed that an understanding of instruction to be an important characteristic with the ever-increasing accountability system in the State of Texas and the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act. Lauren, the newest principal and youngest of the three, noted that 85% of her time was spent in classrooms or meeting with teachers to discuss curriculum, instructional strategies, and student progress. Barbara said that perhaps 50% of her time is spent being an instructional leader. While Allison admitted that she was not able to devote the amount of time she would like being an instructional leader, she felt comfortable in sharing that responsibility with her two assistant principals. “I have two great AP’s (assistant principals) and we divide up all the duties” (Frost, Focus Group, 248-249).

### Balance

Both Allison and Barbara mentioned the various other demands of being a principal and how easy it is to be pulled in several different directions. The participants agreed that it took a good balance of several personality traits and characteristics to be a good middle school principal. One participant summed up this idea by saying:

You can’t just be the bleeding heart. You want to be nurturing, but you

can't be a wuss. You have to be intuitive and take initiative. You can't be shy. I think you have to be out there and be able to network. Network the community, the parents, connect with your interpersonal skills; wheel and deal (Frost Interview #1, 873-876).

Though being a middle school principal provides daily challenges for the participants, it was obvious that they were content in their decisions to become middle school principals.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter provided a description of each of the school districts, middle schools, and principals involved in this research study. As indicated in Table 4.1, the three districts in which the research participants work have a majority of their middle school principals who are female. This phenomenon contradicts the national trend of the majority of middle school principals being male. While this research project can certainly not speak on behalf of the State of Texas or the nation, it does show that at least the three districts involved in the study are leading the way in making the number of female middle school principals more equitable in comparison to the number of men in the same position. The fact that the three women selected for this study are not a minority in their districts in this typically "male-dominated role," may lead to a better understanding of why they did not view themselves as a minority, which is reflected in the data reported in Chapter Five. The following chapter provides an overview of the data collected and an in-depth analysis of the findings thereof.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides an analysis of the qualitative data collected in accordance with the methods set forth in Chapter Three and presents the findings thereof. Data was gathered through interviews, campus visits, field notes, and a focus group discussion. While the data are presented honestly and openly, it is only representative of the three research participants and is not intended to be generalizable to the experiences of all female middle school principals. The stories of these three research participants and their experiences are meant to contribute to the understandings of the nature of their experiences as female middle school principals.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This research study is guided by the following overarching question and two subquestions:

1. What is the nature of leadership experiences of Anglo female middle school principals in a male-dominated arena?
  - a. In what way do female middle school principals interpret and interact with societal constructions of leadership based on gender role expectations?
  - b. What are the perspectives on leadership provided by Anglo female middle school principals, and how do these contribute to new understandings or theories of leadership?

Each of these research questions are addressed in this chapter and are supported through the analysis of the data.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

As described in Chapter Four, the three participants came from unique backgrounds, experiences, schools and district settings. Coincidentally, the ages of the participants also represent three different decades—one participant is in her 30's, another participant is in her 40's, and the third participant is in her 50's. However, the research participants shared similarities in that they are Anglo, female, and were working in the position of middle school principal.

Contrary to the national statistics on the gender of middle school principals cited by Gates, et. al (2003), which indicate that the majority (70%) are male and it is a male-dominated position, the participants in this study worked in school districts where female middle school principals were the majority. While it is common to see a high percentage of females in the elementary principalship, it is uncommon to see females dominating the middle school principalship. This is even more unique in a rural school district, which is the case in this study. Because the three participants come from districts where they are the majority, not the minority, their views of their role in comparison to the social construct of the middle school principal is atypical. These three women did not view themselves as a minority group; nor did they view their position as one that is dominated by males. In their own contextual “worlds” within their school districts, females are the majority.



## **DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS**

Data were gathered in the form of interviews, site visits, and field notes to identify the nature of the experiences of the three Anglo middle school principals. All audiotapes and notes were then transcribed. The researcher listened to the audio tapes repeatedly and reviewed the field notes to ensure the accuracy of the typed transcript. The transcription was given to each of the three participants for her review, which served as member checking. This strategy helped certify the integrity of the transcript and ensure that each participant's voice was accurately documented.

Using the qualitative software N-Vivo, the researcher coded the transcribed interviews and field notes. The "free coding" option in N-Vivo allowed the researcher to code the data into nodes which captured the main idea of a sentence, paragraph, or section. When the free coding of the data was complete, twenty-six nodes were created. Through reading and analyzing these nodes, the researcher recognized emerging patterns and sorted the twenty-six nodes into similar categories or topics. After the initial sorting came additional rounds of reevaluation. In some instances, this resulted in the combination of more than one topic into a major theme.

### **What Is The Nature of Leadership Experiences of Anglo Female Middle School Principals in a Male-Dominated Arena?**

The data revealed an end result of two main themes that best described the nature of these women's leadership experiences: challenging and sacrificial. Both of these major themes contained subtopics, which are elaborated upon in this chapter and are supported by specific quotes from the research participants when applicable. The two themes were

shared with the participants during the focus group discussion as topics that had emerged from the data previously collected through individual interviews with the principals and the field notes of the researcher. All three participants agreed that the two themes accurately summed up the nature of their leadership experiences; and were given an opportunity to elaborate upon these themes during the focus group discussion. The two themes are presented in the following section with an analysis of how each of these themes contributed to describing the nature of the leadership experiences of the research participants and how they relate to the literature that exists.

### Challenging

In this study, the participants described the nature of their experiences as middle school principals as very challenging. According to the dictionary, the term challenging means, “a stimulating or interesting task or problem; arousing competitive interest, thought or action.” When the participants described their experiences, the adjectives “stressful” and “demanding” permeated their stories and were used interchangeably with the word “challenging” as they spoke about the issues they faced on a daily basis in their jobs as middle school principals. The participants elaborated upon the main causes of the stress. These were things such as the time commitment requirements of the job, parent grievances that they had to deal with, high stakes testing and accountability issues, ongoing legislative changes, and a lack of support from others. Coping with these issues was stressful; however, these women were also faced with the demands of a balancing act as they tried to juggle their jobs with their personal lives. These various challenges derived from both internal and external sources such as themselves, parents,

students, teachers, community members, supervisors, and other stakeholders which created an added level of stress and pressure for the participants.

Two of the participants, Allison and Lauren, spoke incessantly about the intense pressure and job-related stress they experienced on a daily basis. Throughout the interviews and site visits with Lauren, she reiterated the difficulty of her job and the high level of stress. On the day of the focus group discussion, 35-year-old Lauren felt as though she was having a heart attack.

I thought I was having a heart attack today. ...I'm starting to see that if I don't have a better lifestyle that my health is not doing as well as it normally has. The heart thing today was a big indicator of that. I think it's anxiety. I'm sure it's work related (Mansfield, Focus Group, 441; 453-456).

The stress of the job literally showed on Allison's face. She suffers from rosacea and eczema—skin conditions evidenced by the red around her nose and the dry patches of skin on her arms and hands. She reapplies makeup to her face to conceal the evidence of her stress and applies lotion to her hands several times throughout the day to ease the physical discomfort she experiences. Allison talked candidly about her condition.

See this? (pointing to her face and hands) This is eczema and rosacea. The doctor tells me you have to have a latent tendency; it has to be in the bloodline. The stress is what brings it out. So now I'm contending with all these skin issues. And you think if your body is falling apart how can you be enjoying what you are doing? (Frost Interview #1, 538-541).

Allison quickly reassured the focus group that she does love her job, the kids, and the staff. However, she openly admits to having gained 100 pounds over the twelve

years she's worked as an administrator. She believes the stress, long hours, sleep deprivation, and meetings equipped with poor food choices are the culprit. Allison often refers to her "self-therapy" as a way to deal with the stressful job she has:

I cannot tell you the number of times I've cried by myself in my car. I would sing church hymns in the car to myself, either coming or going in really tense times just trying to get a grip, get some support. Just trying to put it all back together (Frost, Focus Group, 78-80).

The challenging nature of the middle school principal job was compounded by some particular factors that emerged from the data which include the time commitment required of them as middle school principals, high stakes testing and accountability issues, parent grievances, legislative changes, lack of support, and the balancing act of managing all of these issues while striving to have a personal life as well. Each of these particular stress factors are elaborated upon in the following section and are supported by the data as it relates to describing the challenging, stressful, and demanding nature of the participants' experiences as middle school principals.

#### *Time Commitment*

With the long hours and extra-curricular activities after school and on the weekends, the time commitment for these female middle school principals was incredible. This time commitment created additional stress for the participants – not only are the long hours physically demanding, but it also interfered with any family life that may be desired. Lauren indicated that she arrives at work between 6:00 and 6:30 a.m. and stays until 6:30 or 7:00 p.m. on a daily basis. Allison confirmed those long

hours, "...I pretty much put in twelve-hour days every day" (Frost, Focus Group, 26). Barbara also spoke about the long hours that she put into her job, "I worked until 10 or 11 every night and would go home, go to bed, get up and do the same thing. I did that year after year" (Anderson, Focus Group, 243-245). Lauren commented about the time commitment on several occasions throughout the campus visits and interviews and of how it impedes upon female middle school principals who may want a family.

I don't know how you could raise a family in this role...the hours that go into this job. My husband will say, 'OK, it's seven o'clock and you're still at work.' I just don't know how people do it. Maybe that's why there are a lot of men in this role as opposed to women (Mansfield Interview #1, 91-96).

According to recent studies, there are many reasons why people do not want to be a middle school principal. The top reason cited by 98.6% of the middle school principals surveyed for their article stated that the time demands are too great (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2002; Mulhall, Flowers, & Mertens, 2004). This is consistent with what the research participants revealed in this study.

### *Parent Grievances*

As noted above, the participants spent an enormous amount of time at school doing their jobs. Unfortunately, even with the long hours that the participants put into their jobs, it was impossible for them to keep all of the various stakeholders happy all of the time. The participants spoke of the challenging parent component of their jobs and the ever-increasing frequency of parent complaints in the form of grievances. This was, regrettably, a common theme among the three participants and one that created a great

deal of stress for these middle school principals. Ironically, during the data-gathering period for this research project, all three of the participants were dealing with grievance issues from parents against a teacher on their campuses. In one case, parents had also filed a grievance against the principal. In another case, the possible threat of a grievance by a parent consumed much of the principal's time and attention, taking her away from her other duties and responsibilities. Not only was this principal spending time mediating with the parent, but she was also deeply involved in counseling the teacher during this difficult time.

We are all principals right now in the toughest of times to be doing this job. It's only going to get worse for a little while I think (Frost, Focus Group, 508-509).

Sadly, parent grievances have become an all-too-common occurrence at the campus level, contributing to more stress on the administrators who must work through the grievance process to reach resolution. The first response to a parent grievance is the principal. Therefore, the principal is directly involved with dealing with an angry parent, which is stressful enough; however, in addition, the parent grievance takes the principal away from their normal duties and responsibilities.

### *High Stakes Testing & Accountability Issues*

Another challenging experience for the participants was the various state testing requirements and national standards that are mandated for public schools. Such importance is placed on test scores in the State of Texas and throughout the nation, that the term "high stakes testing" has been coined to accurately describe the scenario. Although testing students is certainly not new in the educational arena, the high stakes

accountability that is attached to them is a fairly recent phenomenon. The “high stakes” for the students is the possibility of retention if the TAKS test is failed. The “high stakes” for the teachers and principals is the rating the campus receives based on the scores of the students. Principals of schools that receive low ratings have little job security. The necessity for good test scores and the pressure for students to perform well were mentioned by all three participants as both challenging and stressful.

I hate all the testing pressure. I hate having to do that to the kids and to the teachers. I don’t necessarily equate it to good education (Frost Interview #1, 543-544).

With the No Child Left Behind Act in place, students are eligible to transfer from their underperforming schools to a school that is making adequate yearly progress (AYP). The demands of making AYP alone are difficult to contend with; but then there is an added pressure for the participants whose schools received new students on transfer from underperforming campuses. In addition, the high mobility rate that is typically experienced in urban and suburban settings create added pressure when it is TAKS test time, as these students scores count at their new school.

The high stakes testing and accountability system in Texas create external pressure from the parents and community onto the principals, as these stakeholders generally blame the school administrator for students’ poor academic scores. These principals also faced internal pressure from their supervisors to have good scores. The teachers’ expectations of their principal can create added pressure in their need to be supported, understood, and relieved of the pressure they experience in regard to the high stakes testing and accountability issues.

Right now you are working so hard just to stay up with the curriculum and make sure you've met all the TEKS so you can score (well) on the TAKS....It's like creativity is on the back burner...and then everybody is so exhausted. It's so hard to make school fun anymore (Frost Interview #1, 504-509).

During the research study, all three participants' schools held an "Academically Acceptable" rating but felt great pressure to maintain at that level for the upcoming testing season because a new "minimum standard" was to be raised for the next year of testing.

### *Legislative Changes*

Legislative changes presented another challenging component for the participants. On each of the site visits to Lauren's campus, she was seen referring to the *Texas School Law Bulletin* for the latest information regarding school law as it pertained to student discipline. On other occasions, she was observed consulting with her supervisor or school attorney regarding the latest legislative changes. Just keeping abreast of the latest changes in regard to student discipline was stressful for Lauren on her high profile campus.

Barbara shared her thoughts on keeping up with the changes and how the inconsistencies create stress not only for her but her teachers as well.

Probably the fact that whether its legislation or whatever it may be, that things change pretty frequently. And just when we think we've got a grasp on a ruling or a law or the way some things are supposed to be handled, a change is there. I think certainly the same type thing is true for the teachers that they often feel like, we have all these new fads that



we are working with and that this too shall pass, this will change. So, I think consistency is important and unfortunately, we have a lot of inconsistency from year to year (Anderson Interview #1, 125-130).

The most recent legislative changes these principals experienced relate to the No Child Left Behind Act, which included new mandates regarding student retention, adequate yearly progress, bullying issues, and highly qualified staff requirements. Each of these pieces, according to the participants, is challenging and stressful to successfully manage and are issues that they are still struggling to successfully accomplish. As noted by Lauren, principals must often seek outside counsel to ensure compliance with these issues on their campuses.

#### *Lack of Support*

Lack of support for female administrators has been cited in the literature as an additional challenge (Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1999). This topic also emerged as a particularly strong concern for at least one of the participants. Its discussion during the focus group was inspirational. A lack of support from female colleagues contributed to the challenging role of being a middle school principal. One participant felt as if other female colleagues did not want her to be a leader and described how the group of middle school principals in her district functioned in a very traditional, non-collaborative manner. “We have middle school meetings that I simply dread; dread horribly. I usually leave crying” (Mansfield, Focus Group, 553-554). She reported having more support from the male middle school principals, but even that was described as flirtatious in the sense that the males would wink at her when they noticed she was being

slighted by the females. She commented on how difficult it has been for her to step into this situation and to function within this construct.

During the focus group discussion, this participant also shared with the others the stress of not having anyone she could talk among her campus administrators or the district's middle school principals. She shared some of the struggles she had faced as a first-year principal; and at times, she choked back tears. One of the other research participants immediately expressed empathy, offered support, and told her how sorry she was that she had to go through all of it alone. She shared some of her terrible first-year experiences as if to ease the pain of the other woman. She made sure that they exchanged phone numbers at the conclusion of the focus group discussion and even enlisted the third participant to provide support to the new principal, should it ever be needed (Focus Group, FN, 10: 233-240).

### *Balancing Act*

The data revealed that the participants experience a daily struggle to find a balance between their job and their personal lives. During the focus group discussion in Allison's office, she shared with the group her favorite story about the delicate balancing act of being a principal:

Imagine life is a game in which you are juggling five balls in the air. You are keeping all of these balls in the air, you soon understand that work is a rubber ball and if you drop it, it will bounce back. However, the other four balls—family, health, friends, and spirit are made of glass. If you drop one of these it will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged

or even shattered. It will never be the same. You must understand this and strive for balance in your life.

While Allison often spoke of the importance of balance, she openly admitted to her continual struggle to carry this out in reality. She often referred to her “self-therapy” concept of taking care of yourself and pulling yourself back together after a hard day.

...The challenges are finding time to do all that you need to do to run a good school, keeping up with your own family and being the mom and the wife and a person—having personal time. You need personal time. Self therapy, time for yourself. It’s a real balancing act. ...You have to keep all these other things in balance or your whole thing just comes crashing down (Frost Interview #1, 545-548; 728-729).

Allison referred to the turtle sculpture in her office that sings, “You gotta slow down, you’re moving too fast, you’ve gotta take care of yourself.” This was a gift to her from her teachers who worried about how much time and effort she put into her job. Allison confessed to not know of any other way to do her job.

Barbara was the only participant who felt as though she had just recently reached a point in her life where there was a better balance between work and her personal life.

I have been able to find a nice balance between work and home and it really has been great for my sanity (Anderson, Focus Group, 245-247). There were years and years where all of my time seemed to be devoted to the job and that would include late hours at work. I have since realized that there has to be a fine balance between the two (Anderson Interview #1, 228-233; 235-236).

Even as Barbara shared this epiphany during the focus group discussion, the other two participants were amazed that such a balance could truly exist and that someone had actually achieved it. They both shook their heads in disbelief.

For these female principals, this balancing act was also impacted by the challenges of meeting the high expectations from many stakeholders. When asked what those expectations were, the following was immediately brainstormed: educating and counseling parents; solving problems; being a good listener; providing a safe place for students free of ridicule and bullying; helping students academically, socially, emotionally, and physically; hiring quality teachers so that there is excellence in all classrooms; making students feel valued; having an open door policy; having efficient and effective systems in place; developing well-rounded kids and preparing them for high school. These ever-increasing demands of the middle school principalship, left two of these three women striving to find balance in their lives. When balance is lacking in one's life, according to the participants, something else usually ends up being sacrificed. The sacrifices these women have made emerged as the second major theme.

### Sacrificial

The word sacrifice means “to suffer loss of, give up; accept the loss of; destruction or surrender of something for something else.” The experiences of the participants certainly matched this definition. Their leadership experiences were undoubtedly sacrificial in nature as they told of giving up their personal and family time as well as their own health and well being for the sake of their jobs as middle school principals. For the participants, the sacrificial nature of their job carried much more of

an emotional charge than when they spoke of the aforementioned challenging, stressful, and demanding situations. The physical, psychological, and emotional sacrifices that the participants and their family members endured was questioned as whether it is worth it. Through the experiences of the participants, these sacrifices are grouped into the following two following types: personal sacrifices and family sacrifices.

### *Personal Sacrifices*

It was apparent from the participants' accounts that all three had made personal sacrifices for the sake of their jobs. Weight gain, high blood pressure, a lack of time for proper rest, exercise and nutrition were common issues for these women that have led to declining physical fitness and health over the years. All three participants spoke about eating out on a frequent basis because there was not enough time to do the grocery shopping or to prepare the meal once they got home from their jobs. They spoke about eating at fast food restaurants, eating out of nervousness, eating on the go, and eating for the extra energy needed for the long hours to do the job.

If this doesn't get any better, I'm gonna' be dead by the time I'm 45. I chalk up the long hours to being new and thinking that I haven't gotten into a pattern yet. ...I'd be better off moving my home here. All I do at home is sleep and bathe. I never have time to make dinner... it was such a big deal that I made homemade soup this weekend. When I was an AP (assistant principal), I'd have dinner ready every night by 6:30. Every night, 6:30. Now I'm lucky to be packing up and getting ready to leave (the school) at 6:30. We have to eat out a lot (Mansfield FN, 3:71-77).

It was also a common thread among the three participants to sacrifice their own well being for the sake of others.

Somebody else's needs come first. The school comes first, your family comes first, and the person that gets put short is you (Frost Interview #1, 722-723).

Coincidentally, only one of the three participants has children. She spoke about the sacrifice of having someone else raise your child—a sacrifice that was so painful for her that she decided to be a stay-at-home mom when her second child was born.

I felt like I was missing out on a lot of stuff. When I was a teacher I put my heart and soul into teaching. It was a 24-hour thing for me. When I had my babies--you just can't do both, you have to give at some place. I didn't feel like I was doing quite the job at teaching that I used to. I was working with really at-risk kids who needed another parent and I was that other parent as well as that other teacher. Then when you have your own kids it cuts in there (Frost Interview #1, 95-110).

Allison chose to be a stay-at-home mom for ten years and sacrificed pursuing her administrative career until her sons were in high school. She reported that at that point her sons were more independent and doing their own things, which would allow her the opportunity to go back and do some things she had wanted to do, such as be a principal. Allison also worried that as a principal something might happen at her school that would bring embarrassment to her family. This was another reason she put off being an administrator until her sons were much older.

### *Family Sacrifices*

It became evident from the data that the personal sacrifices being made extended to the family members as well. One participant shared that she knows a lot of female administrators whose marriages and families have fallen apart due to their work

schedule. One participant commented that the “Super-Mom” concept was a myth and that something has to give; whether it’s you, your spouse, your children or your job. When Allison’s husband encouraged her to apply for the principal vacancy, they had several candid conversations about the sacrifices that would have to be made.

I told him, you don’t understand. You say you understand, but how are you going to feel when I’m not here when you get home and there isn’t any food on the table and you have to start doing more of the house (chores)? You have to understand that it’s not going to be something that’s for a week or two, it’s going to be our lives (Frost Interview #1, 687-691).

Allison confessed that the reasons she is able to be a successful middle school principal are due to her husband being retired and being able to take care of the meals and the housework, the fact that he is completely supportive and understanding of her job, and that her two sons are grown men.

I don’t think you’ll ever have a marriage that works, that will make it if they (husbands) don’t understand the time commitments (of a middle school principal)... (Frost, Focus Group, 630-632).

Lauren, who has completed one year as a middle school principal, shared a recurring conversation she and her husband have and how he just doesn’t quite seem to “get it” yet as to how busy she is (FN, 2:31-32).

Sometimes my husband wants to meet for lunch and it’s really hard for me to do that. I have to make a real effort to get off campus during school hours (Mansfield FN; 1:21-23).

Lauren and her husband also struggled with their desire to have a family – a concept that seemed almost impossible for Lauren to imagine with the job she has.

I don't know how you have a family and do this (job). It would be really hard. You almost have to set an appointment to have time to go home and be a wife. It's a lot of hours, night events, games, dances, and meetings. It can really be a 24/7 day-a-week job. And all the paperwork and dealing with phone calls and parents. It's hard! (Mansfield Interview #1, 180-184)

The sacrifices were many; but seemingly unavoidable to these women if they were to be successful in their positions. Two of the participants advised that women who want a family with children should not consider being a middle school principal because the sacrifice of not being home with those children was too great of a price to pay.

### **In What Way Do Female Middle School Principals Interpret and Interact With Societal Constructions Based on Gender Role Expectations?**

#### Gender and the Middle School Principal

After the initial coding of the data and identification of the two themes that described the nature of the participants' experiences as challenging and sacrificial, the data was coded a second time to look specifically at how these principals interpret and interact within the social constructs of leadership based on gender role expectations (Subquestion A). Throughout the analysis of the challenging and sacrificial themes previously described, the participant's gender played a significant role in how the participants interacted with other people and in how others reacted to them. However, because gender was the focus of Subquestion A, it was intentionally omitted when



discussing the previous themes in an effort to separate gender into its own category.

With gender as its own theme, its full impact on the participants can be realized.

The variable of gender permeated this research project and was evidenced in both of the other two themes. When asked directly about gender, the participants repeatedly claimed that gender did not matter to them; nor did their gender seem to matter to other people. However, once their conversations progressed with the researcher and their stories and experiences were shared and documented, the participants repeatedly contradicted their own claims that gender did not matter. It became evident that gender did matter. When comments were made that validated gender as an issue for these female middle school principals, they would often make another comment to contradict such claims or to downplay their feeling or opinion. Each of the research participants did both—claimed gender did not play a role in how they did their job but then would later refer to their own personal theories of how female administrators do things differently.

The following section will present the interpretations and interactions of the participants in regard to their gender and the social construct about gender that exists within our society. The data yielded three subtopics related to the gender theme: gender denial, social/sex-role stereotypes, and differences in leadership due to gender.

#### Gender Denial

The initial overall denial by the participants that their gender played a role in their principalship experiences was the most prevalent notion within the gender theme. Sometimes this gender denial appeared as a lack of awareness wherein the participants

admitted to not having given their gender much thought. Remarkably, all three participants said that they had not thought about their position in terms of gender before becoming a participant in this research project. At other times, the gender denial transpired as complete silence on the issues, as if to speak about gender issues was forbidden. Throughout the data-gathering period, each of the participants remarked at least once, “Maybe I shouldn’t say that.” One participant in particular frequently felt uncomfortable being completely honest and forthright in her comments. This silence, which has been duly noted in Skrla (2000) and Skrla, Reyes, and Scheurich’s (2000) research, could be due to the fear of possible retaliation. Many women are afraid to speak out against the system they are a part of, especially when they (females) are the minority. In other instances, their denial of gender awareness and gender issues were contradicted by the participants’ mention of their own gender biases.

In response to the overall question of the nature of leadership experiences of these women in a male-dominated arena, none of the three participants indicated that their experiences as leaders of their schools would be any different from what a man would experience. None of them reported being treated any differently because of their gender. Throughout the campus visits, interviews, and focus group discussion, all three women were more likely to say that gender was not a factor in how they did their job, how they got their jobs, or what is expected of them. Although they indicated that gender probably mattered more at the high school and superintendency level, they did not think that gender mattered at the middle school principalship level.

I don't know that gender has an influence on what kind of principal you are. ...I think that I adequately address the people who probably relate a little differently to a male than a female, but it hasn't been a challenge. I think that it would just be people would relate differently....I don't think that's a challenge. ...I think it's getting the buy-in of your staff and your community, irregardless of whether you are male or female. I don't know that gender has an influence on that. (Mansfield interview #1, 99-109.)

While all three participants claimed at some point during the research project that gender doesn't matter, it was Barbara who was the most adamant in her stance.

I guess throughout the whole project and our discussions, I have a hard time separating out the gender—male/female. ...For me, that's not an issue. ...For me, more than the gender, I think it's age or experience (that matters)... (Focus Group, Anderson, 132-133, 210).

Barbara made it clear that she did not view herself in any way different from a male principal, nor did she believe that she was ever treated differently because of her gender. Of the three participants, it was Barbara who appeared to have assimilated the most into the typically-male role of middle school principal. While her appearance could be described as more masculine than feminine, it may explain why she did not feel as if she was treated differently than a male. Barbara did not openly attribute any of her behaviors to being a male or female and often quipped that she was “just human.” Barbara speculated as to what the parents and her staff might say in regard to gender, although she did not think it had any effect on how they perceived her.

I don't feel going into most job interviews that I would have any qualms about the gender of the candidates being interviewed, whether I was going into interview as a male or female. I would feel pretty confident that the decision would be based more on the qualifications of the person. I think certainly if I was interviewing for the position of superintendent that I would probably begin to feel a difference and there may be a slight difference that I would feel as far as interviewing for a high school principalship, but certainly at the middle school level, I wouldn't even begin to question that a male would outrank me just for being male (Anderson Interview #1, 101-109).

I don't know that I feel like there would be any great differences. I suppose if I were to pinpoint anything it might possibly be a perception on the part of parents or Dads maybe. I guess the first thing that comes to mind is possibly at a football game, one dad standing and talking to another dad in regards to football or something like that. That would be the only thing that I would ever really think might single me out in any way in terms of male versus female. ...I have not had any issues from staff members male or female as far as their feeling that my gender came into play (Anderson Interview #1, 256-260; 149-150).

Throughout the shadowing and interviews, it was Barbara who remained the most steadfast in her viewpoint that gender does not matter.

I don't guess I've personally have ever felt very much in terms of a male-dominated society or a male-dominated occupation. Typically on campuses where I've been, it actually has been more female-dominated than male-dominated very much in terms of working relationships with males. (Anderson Interview #1, 166-169).

Because Barbara had not worked in a school district where males dominated the middle school principalship, it is understandable how the above statement reflects her reality.

Allison talked openly about gender issues and claimed, “I don’t get intimidated by race or gender or color or anything else” (Frost Interview #1, 657). However, she admitted that she had never thought of her role as a middle school principal in terms of gender. When asked directly if she thought that being a female middle school principal is different than being a male middle school principal, she replied:

I think naturally there will be differences because you are approaching it from a different mindset. There are people who are going to respond to men and there are people who are going to respond to women (Frost Interview #1, 577-581).

Lauren provided the middle-of-the-road viewpoint regarding gender and served as a balance between Barbara and Allison. Being young and new in her position as a middle school principal, Lauren seemed very aware of the gender issues that she and other female administrators experience; however, she was often hesitant to discuss it—as if to do so would be taboo.

Gender doesn’t matter to me at all. I don’t know that it matters to them (male colleagues). They seem to really embrace me and include me in conversations (Mansfield interview #1, 291-292.)

The participants’ expressions suggesting that gender did not mattering were typically followed by the participants’ descriptions of how gender does matter and how they and others have gender biases. These contradictions to their claims that gender is a non-issue are explored as social and sex-role stereotypes.

### Social Stereotypes/Sex-Role Stereotypes

An idea that many people have about a certain thing or group that may often be true or only partly true is called a stereotype. In our society, stereotypes of all kinds tend to guide the general public's view of how things are, what they should be, and what is or is not acceptable. Social stereotypes also may dictate how people should behave while sex-role stereotypes determine what role or job is appropriate for a person according to their gender. In education, for example, it is a social stereotype to say that males behave a certain way (tough, autocratic, businesslike) and that females behave a certain way (nurturing, caring). It is a sex-role stereotype to say that teaching is for women and the principalship is for men. The participants shared their interpretations and interactions in regard to these stereotypes. Ironically, some of their negative interactions the participants experienced were with their own colleagues.

I just went to a conference this past weekend and I did notice that we were sitting at a table and we were all secondary folks and just a couple of females. The men didn't appear to even reflect on what we had to share. And almost what you say isn't valued. I felt that. They were all high school. Maybe that has something to do with it, high school versus middle school. Maybe they were saying, 'That doesn't fit into what we do as a high school.' It was very noticeable. It was interesting. (Mansfield, Interview #1, 157-163).

Sometimes I feel like some males, especially male high school principals still walk with a big stick...but that comes with years of proving and building that reputation. I think there are some women in the district,

middle school or high school that have that same kind of power but not as many, and not quite as big (of a stick) (Frost Interview #1, 789-793).

There are times when some parent thinks that because he's a man he's going to come in here and intimidate me. It's happened that way before. ...I think there are times that it helps that I'm a female. I think there are times that it's a challenge that I'm a female. Sometimes being recognized in community settings, you know, business settings, for some reason people look at me and think a man might be naturally smarter, or can do something better. I think that's a societal type of thing. I think sometimes being recognized in those community aspects ...until you open your mouth or they see what you've done on your campus or your knowledge base or your ideas... (Frost interview #1, 565-566, 569-576).

A traditional social stereotype that exists is that men work while their wives stay at home. Lauren spoke of working late at her office until 6:30 at night and going home and there being no dinner on the table, the result would be that she and her husband would have to go and eat out at restaurants quite frequently. Allison also shared that the same situation occurred at her house. If a male principal left his office at 6:30 p.m., it would not seem to create as much of a conflict, since his wife would be at home with dinner on the table ready for him. The sex-role stereotype is two-fold: first, that the female of the house is responsible for getting dinner on the table; and secondly, that it is more socially acceptable for the male to be at the office working long hours.

Allison shared her experiences with how social stereotypes impact a female administrator's marriage and family.

I know a lot of administrators that have lost their families over their job. Families have fallen apart, divorces. ...More so for women. That's just society. ...Women hanging back because of family roles not wanting all the extra hours that comes with those leadership positions... It's a real battle with being a mom. Even though we've moved past a lot of that, it's still more acceptable for the father to put in the late hours than the mom. That still hangs in there in society (Frost, Interview #1, 695-698, 634-638).

Allison, the only participant with children, described her interaction within this social construct and described her own participation in the "hanging back".

I was purposely waiting on my kids to get out of high school. I didn't want to be a principal until my kids were out of school. ...I had watched so many of my friends take the smear of the (local) papers. Their picture and their name, this happened to this principal or this happened at this school. I had no way of knowing what might befall me or come my way and I didn't want to be the reason that my children or my family were humiliated. If I was a principal and something happened and it's some big thing in the paper or the news, I didn't want my kids to still be going to school and that kind of rumor mill, I didn't want it to affect my kids. Once they were out of high school then I felt like I could go on and do my principalship and not worry so much. (Frost Interview #1, 440-453).

Another social stereotype mentioned by two of the participants was that men are stereotypically viewed as "tough" and can handle discipline better than women.

I think they still see men, you know, like when you get to the tough kids, you are going to be more fearful or respectful, follow the laws of the male ruler. I think that's still just a concept that might be there (Frost interview #1, 631-633).



Barbara also recognized this stereotype, although she did not agree with it.

A community might feel that a male administrator had stronger discipline than a female administrator might have. I don't think that's in anyway true. I kind of think that might possibly be an old school thinking of males, and that probably goes back to the days of corporal punishment and swinging the board and that type of thing. (Anderson Interview #1, 248-253).

When asked to think about social stereotypes and why there aren't as many female middle school principals as males, the participants had several interpretations to explain the imbalance. Allison attributed the imbalance to women perhaps not believing they were tough enough for the job or that they were not willing to accept the time commitment requirements.

...Not all women feel strong enough or comfortable enough in moving into that realm. I think family issues and being a little fearful of the role and what you would be battling. ...I still think it goes back to family and I still think it goes back to (being) willing, once they understand the commitment, they don't want to make the commitment. Not that they couldn't do it, they just don't want to. And I also think it has to do with some, maybe some fear factor, 'Can I do that?' ...the tougher kids and all that. I really think it has a lot to do with commitment of time and energy and effort and family conflicts. They don't think what little bit of money difference is worth it. (Frost interview #1, 639-642, 675-679).

Lauren, however, had a more positive outlook regarding women breaking the stereotype and believed that there would be an increase in the number of female middle school principals.

This is a hard job. This is a very stressful job. I think dominantly in the past coaches have gone into this role. And we're starting to see that shift. At least in this district, with more women being in secondary leadership roles as opposed to men. ...The traditional mindset of men from coaching; they go into administration. They get into a principalship a lot because of the behaviors of kids. They have dealt with more, talking through scenarios and working with the kids, resolve conflict, that being more appropriate. You are going to see more women in the role; that it is manageable without taking a strong approach. (Mansfield Interview #1, 168-177.)

One participant cautiously disclosed that she had once applied for a middle school principal vacancy but a male got the job. At the time, the upper-level administrators of her district were unaware that she could not bear children. Once she let this information "leak," she was interviewed and selected for the very next middle school principal position that became available in her district. She will never know for certain whether or not the "leak" of this information played a role in her getting the job. Her experience sparked a conversation during the focus group participants that many women may never know if being in their child-bearing years was a reason they were denied a job. Although this type of gender discrimination is illegal, the participants were not in agreement during the focus group discussion that "those types of things" come into play. It is not impossible to imagine that simply being a woman in her child bearing years could be a barrier to the middle school principalship. While all participants were hopeful that a woman's child-bearing status would not matter when it

came time to decide who was chosen for the job, two of the participants were willing to consider that it might possibly be a deciding factor.

Another participant shared her experience of interviewing for a high school principal position – a position that is typically held by males.

...The only time I've ever felt anything at all as far as a male having possibly 'one up' on me as far as a position was when I interviewed for the high school principalship. And I think that, as much as anything, it was just knowing that it was a real heavily male-dominated field (Focus Group, Anderson, 677-679).

Even though Barbara thought that the male applicant had "one up" on her, she was offered the job and accepted the job.

It was obvious that the participants were aware of the social stereotypes and sex-role stereotypes that exist within society about their position. However, it did not appear that those stereotypes distressed them in any way; nor did the participants exert any special effort to change those stereotypes.

#### Differences in Leadership Due to Gender

The participants provided specific examples of their interpretations and interactions in regard to the differences in leadership due to gender. Some of the negative elements mentioned include others viewing women administrators as "pushovers" or not as intelligent as their male counterparts; while some of the positive differences listed were that women were more collaborative, nurturing, caring, empathic, and organized than men. However, Allison and Barbara both professed to enjoy working with men more so than with women.

Lauren, whom seemed more aware of gender issues, speculated about whether the new female superintendent in a neighboring district was treated differently because of her gender.

It seems that people are more comfortable with attacking her on a personal level than they would perhaps with a male. So there may be a difference between a male and a female and how far people push you. Because women tend to take more crap than men. But women, you can push them just a little bit farther than possibly a man. Maybe that's us not drawing a line as opposed to a man. ...We have typically taken a backseat and not stood up so much...I don't think that's all women but when you think of the stereotype, typical female, they are used to taking a lot more (Mansfield Interview #1, 126-135).

As a female, I think people have a tendency to challenge what you say as opposed to saying, 'Okay, you really do know...it's really well thought out.....that was an articulate statement and you have the best interest of my child.' There seems to be that, it seems to be that females are challenged more as opposed to males. There is a world of difference in leadership styles between the two. I don't know that I'm accurately pinpointing that. ...I don't know how to describe that other than, it's just my feeling that they are not as challenged as much as females (Mansfield interview #1, 56-62, 71-72).

Lauren's comments came the day after a very difficult situation occurred on her campus. An angry parent had upset many of the teachers and openly challenged Lauren's authority in a meeting. Lauren admitted that she felt like if she were male, this parent would not have been so vocal and aggressive. For Allison, who is near the end of her

administrative career, working with men in leadership positions tended to be her preference.

I've worked under both male and female principals as an assistant and I've worked side by side with both males and females as the other assistant principal when I was an assistant. And I work better with men. I know that about myself. Somehow we just click better. ...I don't know what it is (Focus Group, Frost, 866-871).

While Barbara proclaimed throughout the research study that there was no difference between male and female leadership, she gave a mixed message when she stated that she preferred to work for a male.

Given the choice, I would probably choose to work with a male. But the other flip side of it is, the individuals that I have worked with both at the principal and superintendent level that I am most respectful of as far as their job and performance are females and I worked beautifully with them. But I, for some reason, I would say yes, that I would probably choose to be in a cohort with males. It's kind of a strange deal. ...I think that often times males are in the upper echelon positions whether it's superintendent or assistant or deputy superintendent and I very much feel comfortable with those individuals (Focus Group, Anderson, 875-889; Anderson Interview #2, 99-101).

When asked point blank if male and female leadership was different from one another, the participants proclaimed there was no difference but then contradicted themselves throughout the conversation and continued to point out specific ideals that indicated otherwise.

I find females are much more collaborative than males. When I think about the principal meetings, it's usually that the females are talking

more instructionally about what's working and what's not working...where the men really say, 'I'm going to solve this.' So there's a real difference there (Mansfield Interview #1, 145-148).

...I see some of the men being more like CEOs and then I see some of the men being very caring, nurturing folks. ...You know some of those females are cat-scratching, power hungry people and I wonder why they are there. Then there are others that are caring (Frost interview #1, 440 459).

Barbara's steadfast claim of there not being a difference between male and female administrators was contradicted by the following statement:

I don't want in any way to sound biased, but I do feel as female administrators, that we may possibly bring an extra element of empathy or caring to the position that may or may not necessarily be the case. ...I think bonding and working with students is something that I find great pleasure in. I think maybe that might be easier sometimes for a female than it might be for a male. ... Some people are more open to sharing and that may be tied to gender or it may not necessarily be (Anderson Interview #1, 152-161; 318-319).

Barbara attributes empathy and caring to the female gender, but then immediately discounts her own opinion. She also commented later that the male principal she replaced was a very nurturing individual, in an effort perhaps to prove that certain attributes are not tied to gender.

...I think that staff would probably feel that a female administrator is more compassionate than a male administrator might be. I think they also probably feel that organization on behalf of a female is sometimes more precise than it would be otherwise. (Anderson Interview #1,143-148).

Allison shared her thoughts on how certain characteristics, such as nurturing and loving, might be tied to gender.

Maybe this is my own gender bias and there's nothing to it, but just that normally for females that mothering or nurturing characteristic really comes out to play because it's like being a Mama on the campus. I think that sometimes a lot of kids respond to that more than they do the male strength piece. But I think there's a place for both. ...I know a lot of my male colleagues that almost feel like it's sometimes they are at a disadvantage because they have to be so careful or they may be accused of being inappropriate with females or children or they wish they could be a little more nurturing or loving. They would like to hug or pat on the backs, you know. But they are worried about being misconstrued. So sometimes that works against them. Or they feel like if they show a side, a more nurturing side they look like wusses instead of the strong male leader they should be. There's a lot of men that are very warm and caring people and there are some really cold, tough-cookie women...I think there maybe are certain tendencies from each gender that lend itself to certain special things (Frost, Focus Group, 141-144; Frost Interview #1, 804-810, 461-465).

Allison had distinct thoughts about how leadership is different for men and women. Her thoughts on this topic include nurturing, content and instruction, intuitiveness, and a different kind of strength that keeps women going.

I think we're (females) good with content, instruction, intuitiveness. We have that nurturing, caringness to us for the most part. I think we can get the big picture of climate and family and campus. I think we take initiative. I think we are hard workers. ...They (women) can stay up all night and work, work, work, and keep the attitude, do all the stuff and not

fall apart. I think that is very true for women. I really do. I think there is something there. It's a different kind of strength. You have to keep going. You know that you have to keep going. Fall apart another time but not now, that kind of thing (Frost interview #1, 593-599, 607-611).

The participants also shared their perspectives on career advancement and how opportunities to move up might be tied to gender. They reported that males typically move up the career ladder at a faster pace than females; and that females tend to stay in the classroom as teachers for longer periods of time. It was also their common belief that male coaches were typically moved into administrative positions.

...What I would feel might be an influencing factor might be possibly males make early on, or earlier in their career, feel like, 'I'm going to be in the classroom for a couple of years and then climb up the ladder' so to speak. Whereas females, I think it might possibly be more that they are in the teacher role for a longer period of time and not really thinking administration and then maybe further down the road begin to move in that direction. That may not be true at all but I would think that would be the only thing that I would see as a difference is that the males may be more prone to move up (Focus Group, Anderson, 773-780).

I think you are seeing more and more women in leadership roles. You are seeing more and more women in superintendency roles. I think you are seeing more women invited to speak at national conferences, in research and co-authoring things. I think it's in all aspects. You used to just see women as teachers and they were not the administrators. The coach was the principal, they never made it past the classroom. I just don't think you see that anymore, maybe in Podunk, Texas. For the most part I think there is equal respect there (Frost interview #1, 616-623).



## **What Are The Perspectives on Leadership Provided by Anglo Female Middle School Principals and How do These Contribute To New Understandings or Theories of Leadership? (Subquestion B)**

The following section addresses the leadership perspectives of the participants. It will highlight the following four types of leadership that emerged from the data: servant leadership, collaborative leadership, instructional leadership, and nurturing leadership.

### Leadership Perspectives

#### *Servant Leadership*

Servant leadership refers to serving others, such as complying with the commands or demands of others; to adapt one's actions to another's request or need. According to Greenleaf (1991), servant leadership encompasses ten attributes: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. It has been said that "true leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others" (Spears, 2004).

In the educational realm, servant leadership is about acting to meet the needs of the students, their families and the community. The servant leader makes personal sacrifices for the sake of others and simply puts others first. The many sacrifices made by the participants in this study on the behalf of others were a predominantly evident throughout the data. The research participants modeled servant leadership by always putting others first—their school, their students, and their community.

...If you think the principalship is about power, if you are after power or you think you are some hot shit because you're a principal, I think you are sunk. You've got to have a heart and like people. You've got to want to be in the business because you want to make a difference for kids and parents and community (Frost Interview #1, 362-366).

The message was clear that in the participants' role as the middle school principal, others come first, including their staff members.

I do everything I can to support my teachers in the classroom, get the things they need, listen. Anytime they want me night or day, I'm there. Ready to listen ready to do whatever. Anytime. (Frost Interview #1, 741-743).

Allison's servant leadership style was revealed on the morning of the first site visit. Before school started she was in the band room sewing buttons onto band uniforms and hemming pants so that the students would look good at their performance that day. She mentioned that she had taken several uniforms home the night before and stayed up until 1 a.m. making alterations. This was mentioned in a matter-of-fact way and accompanied by Allison's remark that "we just do whatever it takes" as she picked up an iron and began ironing the students' white button-down shirts (Frost, FN, 1:23). Barbara and Lauren also agreed that their roles as servant leaders was to support the teachers in the classroom on a daily basis. This was an obvious decision that each of the participants had made, and one that often was at the expense of their own well-being, personal time, or family time.

Your time has to be all about making your staff happy, your kids happy, your community happy. Your time has to be about keeping up their strength, their morale, their nurturing, doing whatever you have to do,

funding-wise, supply-wise, creative planning to make time, it's all about them. It can't be anything about you. ...You have no personal life. Your life is your job and your school (Mansfield Interview #1, 217-220).

### *Collaborative Leadership*

Collaborative leadership involves others in the decision-making process, with a sharing of the responsibilities. It involves getting all stakeholders involved and working together as a team; and is often referred to as shared leadership. Collaborative leadership is the opposite of the traditional top-down, autocratic approach to leadership and is noted in research by Shakeshaft (1986, 1987) and Noddings (1991). Throughout the research study, each of the participants referred to their leadership style as collaborative.

90% of this job is problem-solving and supporting your staff. I'm not a micro-manager; I delegate. I'm collaborative (Frost Visit #3, FN, 41-43).

The participants used "collaborative talk" such as "we, us, cooperation, and together"; and were observed working together with students, teachers, parents, and colleagues. They credited their success to the strengths and talents of their teachers and staff members.

My leadership role is collaborative. ...Always exploring what it is that we can do better collectively—that we are not just examining ourselves individually but as a collective group so that we can improve the campus. That it's an open door type of situation where they (stakeholders) feel freedom to voice concerns and take risks. And that we are all learning together (Mansfield Interview #1, 31-35).

The participants did not just claim to be collaborative leaders, they were observed throughout the site visits working in collaboration with various campus stakeholders. During the second site visit with Lauren, she was observed conducting her morning and afternoon debriefings with her assistant principals. Each member of the team was given time to share about their day, concerns, or ask any questions they may have. It was very much a collaborative effort to maintain the daily functions of the campus and to make sure all campus administrators were “on the same page” (Mansfield, FN, 2:1-6). During the same visit, Lauren met with a group of special education teachers to collaboratively problem solve regarding a student who was experiencing difficulty. Lauren listened intently, asked questions, and offered solutions, just as did the other members attending the meeting (Mansfield, FN, 2:81-94). This same visit also entailed interviewing math teachers for a vacancy Lauren had. This too was a collaborative process that involved the math team, a counselor, an assistant principal, and a parent (Mansfield, FN, 2:42-59).

On the second site visit with Barbara, her collaborative style was evidenced throughout the middle school principal’s meeting. She volunteered to facilitate the meeting and was very conscientious that all members of the team had equal opportunities to participate (Anderson, FN, 2:46-54). During the campus leadership team meeting, Barbara listens and contributes equally with the other members in attendance. Her collaborative style comes across in a relaxed, matter-of-fact way (Anderson, FN, 69-72).

### *Instructional Leadership*

Instructional leadership requires that the principal have a strong background and understanding of curriculum and instructional matters. A good instructional leader must know the subject matter being taught at the middle school level, understand curriculum alignment, and guide teachers in the use of best practices when delivering instruction to the students. Being the instructional leader on a campus may be a relatively new concept, perhaps evolving out of the high stakes accountability testing in the State of Texas. It has been noted in the literature by Browne-Ferrigno (2003) and Newton, et al. (2003) as a positive attribute for all school administrators. Being a strong instructional leader, according to Coffon (2003), could correlate to higher achievement scores of students. The participants in this study viewed instructional leadership as a primary component of their jobs.

I think we look at instructional leadership in a variety of capacities whether it means analyzing test scores or working with teachers, working with a department, and even evaluating teachers (Anderson Interview #2, 29-31).

With these tests and the latest AYP requirements of NCLB, come the pressure for campuses to have acceptable ratings for all students and subgroups. This can only be obtained through an increased focus on instruction to impact student achievement. While all three of the participants considered themselves an instructional leader on their campus, it was Lauren—the youngest and newest to the position—who reported allocating 85% of her time being the instructional leader.

I would say that I'm working as an instructional leader 85% of my day. I'm either in the classroom or visiting with that teacher about where they are at with the curriculum or where the kids are at and making sure that there is a system in place for the kids (Mansfield Interview #2, 220-224).

During each of the site visits with Lauren, classrooms observations were conducted as part of the informal walk-throughs that she conducts on her campus (Mansfield, FN, 2:69-79). After each 10-15 minute observation, Lauren completes the walk-through form and leaves it with the teacher. Each of these teachers must stop by Lauren's office before the end of the day to review and discuss the form. It was evident that Lauren was very much in tune with the instructional practices taking place in each classroom. Lauren indicated that she and her school had many people watching it to make sure it was the model school it should be. All participants agreed that being an instructional leader was important to them; although the other two participants were comfortable delegating some of this responsibility to their assistant principals. Allison shared her experiences of piloting new math and reading programs for her school and district as well as being one of the first middle schools in her district to integrate all content areas so that instruction would be more meaningful to students, along with aligning the curriculum to the TEKS and TAKS. Allison went to great lengths in her second interview to share the journey she and her staff have gone through to align their curriculum, try new programs, and determine which best practices are making a difference in their students' achievement scores (Frost, Interview #2, 30-105). As the instructional leader of her campus, Allison felt that it was important for her to prepare for and take the ESL certification exam since she was requesting forty of her teachers to

do the same. During the interview, she expressed her concern about passing the test, but felt that it was more important for her to lead by example in order to stress the importance of learning the ESL teaching strategies that would benefit their students (Frost, Interview #2, 100-121).

Barbara shared her thoughts on what her job as an instructional leader entails.

I think very much every principal is in an instructional leadership role. I thank that it's an important role to be in. I think it's also very much a juggling act with so many things happening on the campus. ...Being an instructional leader is certainly paramount in this position (Anderson Interview #2, 22-26).

### *Nurturing Leadership*

The fourth type of leadership the participants espoused was a nurturing leadership style. To nurture means to promote the development, growth, or progress of others. In every aspect of these women's jobs, they lived this definition; they truly cared about others. They showed compassion, empathy, care, and nurturance when dealing with the various stakeholders of their school and community. The nurturing aspect of female leadership has been noted in the literature by Noddings (1991), Shakeshaft (1986, 1987), and Ortiz (1982). The participants were observed nurturing others during each of the campus visits; however, they did not believe that they were doing anything out of the ordinary. In other words, this nurturing type of leadership seemed second nature to them, perhaps due to social stereotypes or sex-role stereotypes as mentioned in Chapter Two.

Lauren reminded the participants during the focus group that, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care”(Focus Group, Mansfield, 161). She believed this to be true for adults as well as students.

I hope we’re all caring about one another and it’s not just coming from one source, but from everyone—kid to kid, kid to teacher, teacher to teacher as well (Focus Group, Mansfield, 163-165).

All of the participants were observed hugging students, hugging teachers, wiping away students’ tears, cleaning up after students, teachers, and colleagues, and in one case even sewing buttons onto students’ clothing. These specific types of behaviors are not typically observed in male administrators.

I don’t in any way want to sound biased, but I do feel as female administrators that we may possibly bring an extra element of empathy or caring to the position. That may or may not necessarily be the case. ...I do think that we are able to empathize with students in a different manner and interact with students and I think that’s important (Anderson Interview #1, 155-157; 172-174).

As mentioned by one of the participants, this may be due to the social construct that it is more acceptable for a female to do these types of things. Allison believed that she could get away with hugging her staff and students and telling them she loved them because she was viewed as everyone’s grandmother. All three participants said that nurturing others was part of their job and overall did not attribute nurturing as gender specific behavior. To make their point, two of the participants referenced their male predecessors as being very nurturing leaders.



During each of the campus visits, the principals were seen hugging students, giving pats on the back, offering words of encouragement, and in some cases holding the hand of a student. In observing these women dealing with upset students, all three participants were very nurturing, compassionate and supportive. They were uninhibited to bring the student closer in proximity to them or to offer them a hug. Their voices would often become soft and gentle as they reassured the student that everything would be all right. The participants were forthright in telling students that they cared about them and were often observed giving students pep talks.

When I'm working with kids, I'm more of a nurturing, caring, teacher, mother, administrator, leader. ...I think you just really have to have that nurturing, caring, loving piece on your campus for all those (students) who don't get that consistently (Frost, Interview #1, 778-779; Focus Group, Frost, 151-153).

Lauren's caring, nurturing way was observed when a female student came into her office who was upset and crying. Lauren was compassionate in reassuring the student that she and the teachers were there to support her. She hugged the girl and held her hand and gently patted it while she spoke softly to her and offered student council to her as an opportunity for the girl to make friends and have some fun in school. Lauren took the extra time to walk the student around campus to meet members of the student council and then walked the student back to her class (Mansfield, FN, 1:232-249).

The participants were also observed nurturing their teachers and other staff members just as much as they nurtured their students. The same pats on the back, pep

talks, and in some instances hugs were openly and freely given. One participant summarized this behavior as “mothering your staff.”

You kind of mother your staff...as they are going through their personal stuff...I can tell you stuff that’s going on in everybody’s lives and how I’m trying to support them with those personal issues and still help them focus on being the best teacher they can be (Frost Interview #1, 304-305; 312-315).

Allison looked at her list of staff on her wall and began listing details of each one’s personal life and issues that some were going through. It was clear that she looked after them like a mother would. When she asked the other two participants if they felt the same way, they both agreed that they mother their staff members as well and that it is not limited to school-related business. All three of the principals were in tune with each of the personal lives of their staff members and nurtured them regarding their personal issues as well.

This nurturing leadership style was also evidenced consistently throughout the study when the principals asked their staff members, “How can I support you?” One participant offered to buy the classroom supplies herself in order to provide the resources the teacher felt she was lacking. Barbara was observed counseling a teacher who was dealing with a difficult parent and a possible forthcoming grievance. She gently reassured the teacher and explained how she would support her throughout the matter (Anderson, FN 3:1-3). Barbara’s encouragement was well received by the teacher.

Nurturing leadership was demonstrated among the participants and their colleagues of fellow administrators. In the focus group session, when one participant mentioned not having supportive colleagues, one of the other participants offered her support and was very nurturing and empathic. On another occasion while attending a lunch meeting with another of the participants and her middle school principal colleagues, it was noted how she took care of serving food and beverages to her colleagues in attendance—offering them more food and cleaning up afterwards, even though the meeting was at another female principal's house. The participants each felt it was important that they nurture and support one another as women school leaders.

#### New Perspective on Leadership

The four leadership perspectives of servant leadership, collaborative leadership, instructional leadership, and nurturing leadership are certainly not new concepts in the field of education; however these findings are representative of new perspectives because they are based on the female perspective. The unique ways in which each of the participants combined these leadership styles to fit their needs, their campuses, and specific situations certainly provides a new perspective on female leadership. Each of the participants embraced an eclectic perspective of leadership and used the four styles of leadership interchangeable. In this sense, they could flex from one style to another as the situation required. While comfortable in all four styles, two of the participants held strong preferences towards certain styles. For example, Allison's strength was servant leadership followed by her knack for nurturing leadership. That's not to say that Allison did not use the other leadership styles; she did. However, in reviewing Allison's

transcripts, servant leadership and nurturing leadership made up a common thread throughout almost everything she spoke about. In Lauren's case, instructional leadership was her strength. The other three types of leadership perspectives were evident in Lauren's transcripts as well; however, instructional leadership permeated her transcripts as it was often the lens through which Lauren was most often looking.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the findings from the data regarding the overall nature of the experiences of the three Anglo, female middle school principals. These findings included how these women interpret and interact in the male-dominated position of middle school principal within the social constructs that currently exist. Lastly, this chapter provided information regarding the leadership perspectives of the participants.

The following chapter provides a summary of the research study, significant findings of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research in the area of female leadership.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Chapter Six presents a summary of the study, including the findings and conclusions of this study. It also includes implications for practice as well as suggestions for further research about female school administrators. The framework for this study was established through a review of the literature on topics of female leadership such as the barriers female administrators face and how their style of leadership is different from that of males. The purpose of the study was to explore the nature of the leadership experiences of three female middle school principals—in essence, how they perceive school leadership as they function within a male-dominated social construct. Through shadowing these women on their campuses, conducting individual interviews, holding a focus group discussion, and maintaining field notes, their stories were documented.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The focus of this study was to determine the nature of the experiences of three female school administrators at the middle school level. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the nature of leadership experiences of Anglo female middle school principals in a male-dominated arena?

- a. In what way do female middle school principals interpret and interact with societal constructions of leadership based on gender role expectations?
- b. What are the perspectives on leadership provided by Anglo female middle school principals, and how do these contribute to new understandings or theories of leadership?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This multiple case study used qualitative research methods to explore the experiences of three Anglo female middle school principals in Texas. The participants for the study were chosen using a purposeful sampling which included intensity sampling, homogeneous sampling, and convenience sampling as described by Patton (1990). The individual participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) female; (2) Anglo; (3) three years experience as campus administrator; (4) one year experience in current position as principal; (5) campus rating of at least “academically acceptable” or higher according to the State’s accountability system; and (6) school district rating of at least “academically acceptable” or higher according to the State’s accountability system. One participant each was chosen from a small, medium, and large size district in order to examine the experiences of the women for similarities and differences.

The primary source of data came from the individual interviews with the participants and a focus group discussion. In addition, the researcher maintained field notes from the campus visits that included observational notes, anecdotal records, and

notes regarding the researcher's personal reflections about the women. All data was analyzed using N-Vivo software to code major themes and subtopics. To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data, triangulation and member checks were conducted with the participants.

## **SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH**

This study was based on a similar research study that focused on three Anglo female high school principals (McGovern-Robinett 2002). The rationale for the importance of this study is similar to the one established in McGovern-Robinett's study; however, it is unique due to its focus on the middle school level: (1) the middle school principalship is a position typically held by males; (2) limited research exists that documents the female experience of middle school principals; and (3) it is an intriguing topic to the researcher who is a female school administrator. In addition, it was assumed that this study could contribute to a better understanding of female leadership and could yield relevant information that might assist in the improvement of preparation programs when training women to become middle school principals.

The underrepresentation of women in upper level administrative positions and the lack of acknowledgement to their contributions have been noted in the literature (Shakeshaft 1986, 1987, 1994, 1999; Skrla, et al., 2000; McGovern-Robinett, 2002). Although gains have certainly been made in this nation in regard to women attaining upper level administrative positions, it is difficult to pinpoint exact numbers of female middle school principals in the State of Texas and in the nation due to the lack of reliable data (Shakeshaft, 1987; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Valentine, et al., 2002; Adams

& Hambright, 2004). Currently, an exact accounting system to track the gender of middle school principals does not exist. While the names of middle school principals can be obtained through the Texas Education Agency's website (by looking up a list of middle schools in the state) and through the Association of Secondary School Principals organization, a person's gender is not always discernable by name alone. According to the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey, the middle school principal position is still typically held by a male with only 31.4% of middle school principals nationwide being female (Gates et al., 2003). Following this trend, most of the current literature about school leadership, typically, is written from the male perspective.

After reading McGovern-Robinett's study of high school female principals and searching for literature on middle school female administrators, it became obvious that a significant gap existed in the research. In fact, more studies have been conducted about female high school principals and female superintendents than about the female middle school principal. In regard to the existing literature, the female middle school principal seemed to be a position that had "fallen through the cracks." Therefore, this study focused on the stories of three Anglo female middle school principals in an effort to accurately document their experiences, interpretation, interactions, and ways of leading in a male-dominated position; and to make a meaningful contribution to the limited research that exists on this topic. Based on study participants' sharing of their personal and professional experiences, it is hoped that insight and understanding about female school leadership is gained and that opportunities for self-reflection will continue for the reader beyond the scope of the research project.



## **FINDINGS**

### **The Nature of the Leadership Experiences of Anglo Female Middle School Principals**

According to the interpretations and interactions of the participants' in this study, their experiences as middle school principals were both challenging and sacrificial in nature. The six variables the participants identified as catalysts to describe the challenging nature of their experiences were: time commitment, parent grievances, high stakes testing and accountability issues, legislative changes, lack of support, and a balancing act. The sacrificial nature of the participants' experiences were described within two variables: personal sacrifices and the sacrifices of their family members. Each of these will be summarized in the following section.

#### Challenging Experiences

The challenging nature of the middle school principalship caused great amounts of stress, demands, and pressure on the participants. Declining health, weight gain, and sleep deprivation were derivatives from internal and external forces such as time commitment required of the job, parent grievances, high stakes testing and accountability issues, legislative changes, lack of support from others, and the balancing act that is required in juggling work with personal time or family life. This finding supports an explanation in recent studies that questioned why qualified and certified administrators were not applying for principal vacancies (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Females, more so than males, are not seeking such positions due to the challenges, excessive time requirements, and the potential for job-related stress (Browne-Ferrigno,

2003; Newton et al., 2003). The balancing act dilemma the participants struggled with is congruent with the literature by Crutcher (1992) and Brown-Ferrigno (2003). According to their research, striving for balance between family and career serves as a barrier for aspiring female administrators. The lack of support felt by one of the participants is noted in the literature in terms of career socialization research by Ortiz (1982) and in identification of a lack of mentoring, role models, and sponsorship for women as noted in Hicks (1991) and Crutcher (1992). Females aren't typically socialized to be in upper level leadership positions; therefore, when they attain these positions, there is a feeling of isolation. There may be little support from male colleagues; and as noted in Ortiz's (1982) research, any female colleagues typically do not offer their support either. It could also be ascertained that the nature of the middle school principalship experience is more challenging for women than men, due to these women going against the social constructs that exist in regard to sex-role expectations and social stereotypes that they encountered on a regular basis.

### Sacrificial Experiences

The middle school principalship demands a sacrificial attitude from those in the position. The participants shared experiences of personal and family sacrifices such as putting their own health and well-being aside, putting their career on hold to raise children, deciding not to have children, having little time for spouses and/or family time, and having little or no personal time. The literature validates these sacrifices and indicates that they become a deterrent to female administrators entering the principalship (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Browne-Ferrigno's (2003) study and that of Newton, et al.,

(2003) state that until these positions become less sacrificial in nature, low numbers of female administrators will exist. They suggest having a collaborative model of leadership wherein two administrators are hired to carry out the various leadership responsibilities of the principal—one to be the instructional leader and one to serve as the organizational manager. The study also suggests paying a higher salary as a recruitment incentive to get women into these positions of leadership (2003).

### **How Female Middle School Principals Interpret and Interact with Societal Constructions of Leadership Based on Gender Role Expectations**

Subquestion A of this research study addressed the gender aspect of the participants and how they interpreted and interacted within the societal constructions that exist. Three variables emerged: gender denial, social and sex/role stereotypes, and differences in leadership due to gender.

#### Gender & The Middle School Principal

Gender denial, unawareness, and silence emerged as the participants' responses as to how gender played a role in their interpretations and interactions within the social construct of the middle school principalship. The most common thread was an overall denial related to gender as an issue. The participants' denial presented itself in various forms such as outright claims that gender doesn't matter, a lack of awareness or not thinking about gender issues, and a conscious or unconscious silence. The denial of gender issues, unawareness, and silence is congruent with the literature by Noddings (1991), Shakeshaft (1986, 1987, 1994, 1999), Skrla (2000), and Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich (2000). The participants claimed that they had never thought about their jobs

in terms of gender. This lack of awareness was also evident when the participants were asked about the glass ceiling effect. They asked for a definition of the glass ceiling and then responded that they had never experienced or heard of it. The participants were also unaware of their stance on feminism. They were unable to provide any examples of ways they had supported other females or a pro-female stance in general (Focus Group, 660-680).

It is apparent from the study findings that the three research participants provided a varied range across the continuum of beliefs, thoughts, and views about being a female middle school principal. One participant felt that her gender did not play a role in her administrative experiences and claimed that being a female in a male-dominated position was nothing different from what a male would experience. Coincidentally, this participant appeared to have assimilated the most into a male role—she did not wear dresses, wore little or no makeup, and had a more masculine-than-feminine air about her.

The youngest participant, who was also the person with only one year of experience as a principal, seemed keenly aware of her gender and how it played out in the various experiences of her job. However, this participant was not comfortable talking about the gender differences she felt. Her guarded reaction to the conversations was reflected in her repeated question to the researcher, “You’re not going to include that, are you?” This conscious silence has been noted in Skrla (2000) and Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich (2000). In order to gain her trust and the opportunity to hear about her experiences, certain items were omitted from the study at her request.

The participant who was the closest to retirement age was aware of her gender and the role it played in being a middle school principal and was not intimidated to talk about it. Perhaps this willingness to openly address the issues could be attributed to her age or perhaps to her personality. This participant divulged on the first site visit that she had nothing to hide and would be an open book, easily accessible to the researcher.

### **Participants' Perspectives on Leadership and Contributions to New Understandings or Theories of Leadership**

Subquestion B explored the leadership perspectives of the participants, which unveiled four types of leadership: servant leadership, collaborative leadership, instructional leadership, and nurturing leadership.

#### Leadership Perspectives

Middle school leadership from the perspectives of the participants yield four types: servant leadership, collaborative leadership, instructional leadership, and nurturing leadership. While these types of leadership were not directly linked to gender by the participants, others often associate them more with females. Research by Noddings (1991) and Shakeshaft (1986, 1987) have found women to be more collaborative and nurturing in their leadership style. However, the Browne-Ferrigno's study (2003) and the Newton, et al., study (2003) examined male and female attributes, socialization, role conception, and role identity transformation and found nurturing and collaboration to be positive attributes for all principals to possess.

Many of the behaviors and leadership attributes that were observed in the participants correspond with Greenleaf's (1991) definition of servant leadership.

Serving others, being a good listener, and helping others grow and build community were observed as strengths in the servant leadership style that the participants exhibited and are congruent with Spears' (2004) description of "true leadership."

Research also indicates that the typical career path for female administrators begins in the classroom as teachers and that females stay in the classroom longer than males. This additional classroom experience tends to make female administrators stronger instructional leaders (Ortiz, 1982; Grogan & Brunner, 2005). According to Coffon's (2003) research on principals and student achievement, this keen knowledge of instruction can also translate into higher achievement for the students. Certainly the combination of these four leadership perspectives equate into a positive correlation for the middle school principals in this study and provide a female perspective that heretofore has not been duly noted.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The findings of this study lead to the following conclusions.

### **The Nature of the Leadership Experiences**

The middle school principalship tends to be very challenging for female leaders. Certain factors continue to make the middle school principalship difficult for females, such as: the time commitment required of the job, parent grievances, high stakes testing and accountability issues, legislative changes, lack of support from others, and the continuous struggle to find balance between personal life and the demands of the job. The middle school principalship also requires a great deal of personal and family sacrifice for female leaders. These factors that affect female leaders serve as deterrents

and could explain why secondary school principal positions remain a male-dominated position.

### **Gender Matters**

Gender plays a significant role in how the middle school female leader interprets and interacts within the male-dominated social construct. Denial of the gender factor is one way in which female middle school principals deal with issues.

### **Leadership Perspectives**

Middle school female leaders' perspectives are reflected in four leadership styles: servant leadership, collaborative leadership, instructional leadership, and nurturing leadership. How these leadership styles are exercised depends on the situation at hand.

### **Implications for Practice**

From the research study and the experiences shared by the middle school principals, two implications for practice became evident that could be beneficial to educational administration and female leadership. These two implications involve preparation programs for educational administrators and development of a mentoring network for female school leaders.

#### **Preparation Programs**

It was apparent from this study's findings that gender had not been addressed in the participants' leadership preparation programs. Gender differences in leadership have been noted in the literature and should be brought to the forefront and discussed during preparation programs. This could be addressed by focusing on gender through literature

reviews, class debates, and action research. Educating future female principals about gender differences in leadership should occur in traditional university preparation programs and alternative certification programs. Having an awareness of gender differences in leadership will better prepare females for the principalship.

### Mentoring Network

As noted in recent literature, females are attaining administrative credentials but are consciously choosing not to apply for the principalship (Adams & Hambright, 2004; Tallerico, 2000). This is viewed as a waste of female talent (Adams & Hambright, 2004). An effective mentoring network could provide guidance and support to females who are wavering in their decision to enter the principalship and could positively impact the number of women in school leadership positions.

This second implication for practice entails a more formalized creation of a mentoring network for female school leaders. While men have their “good old boy” network of mentoring, there lacks a formalized system of a mentoring network for women. This could begin at the university level when women begin their coursework in educational administration. Assigning female university faculty members or former female graduates of the program as a mentor would assure that the future female administrators would have some type of mentor or networking system in place that would offer guidance and support for them.

A second avenue for providing a mentoring network could come from women’s professional organizations. Organizations such as Texas Council for Women School Executives and the American Association for School Administrators provide



conferences and seminars designed specifically for women. Veteran female administrators within these types of organizations could provide a mentoring network for aspiring and new female school leaders.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study focused on the experiences of three Anglo female middle school principals in select school districts with at least an acceptable rating from the Texas Education Agency. It did not include, examine, or analyze male principals, principals who are of color, or principals from elementary or high school levels. This study attempted to broaden the male perspective that currently dominates the literature since existing research about female school administrators in general is limited. When looking specifically for literature about female administrators at the middle school level, the research is almost nonexistent. Therefore, it is imperative that research about female school administrators at all levels continue. For instance, further inquiry could focus on diversity, age, parenthood, or tenure.

### **Diversity**

One criterion used for this study was race in that the participants had to be of Anglo background. As mentioned in Chapter Four, it was difficult to find three Anglo females who met all the criteria for this study. Further studies could focus on female school administrators of diverse ethnic backgrounds such as African American, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American. Because such a small number of minority female middle school principals exist, finding female school leaders of diverse backgrounds would be an obstacle. However, to find them and document their perspectives and

experiences as leaders would undoubtedly enrich the theory and practice in the field of educational administration that is most often viewed through the dominant, Anglo culture.

### Parenthood

A second suggestion for further research would be to control in selection of the research participants based on whether or not the women were parents. In this study, one of the participants had children and the other two did not. Future studies could attempt to control for this variable if possible so that either all the participants do or do not have children. In addition, one might go a step further and choose to control for the age of the children. For example, only one participant in this study had children; however, one of her sons was in high school and the other had already graduated from high school when she assumed the principalship. According to her, the time demands of her children at this age were minimal in comparison to her female colleagues who had babies or elementary age children. Choosing research subjects who have children could provide rich data about the experiences of balancing the principalship with being a mother of young children.

### Age

A third suggestion for further research would be to choose participants who are similar in age. The participants' age in this study spanned across three decades and ranged from the 30's to the 40's and the 50's—an occurrence that happened by chance. It was apparent in this study that the participants were certainly in very different stages of their lives. Lauren was just beginning her career as a principal and was struggling

with the decision to adopt children or not have any children. She also had aspirations of being a curriculum person at the district level. While Barbara and Allison, on the other hand, often spoke about their job as a middle school principal as being their last and finishing out their last few years before retirement. This certainly put the participants in a different mindset; therefore, one might choose to control for this variable and have participants' age fall within the same decade so that their age and life patterns may be more congruent with one another.

### Tenure

Lastly, the number of years of experience the participants have as a principal could make a difference in the outcome of the data. Therefore, future researchers may want to control for tenure in selecting the participants. In this study, one participant was at the beginning of her career as a principal while the other two were more towards the end of their principal career. This seemed to make a difference as to their interpretations and perspectives in regard to their experiences as middle school principals. In further studies, the participants may share more commonalities if selected based on having similar number of years of experience in the principalship.

### **SUMMARY**

This chapter provided a summary of the research, findings, and conclusions of the study conducted with three female Anglo middle school principals. It has provided the implications for practice as well as recommendations for further research in the area of women in educational administration.

This study has searched for a deeper understanding of the possible differences in experiences that females middle school principals may have in comparison to their male counterparts. It has sought to document the experiences of women in the middle school position and the positive attributes they bring to the position. It is hoped that the documentation of their stories will provide information as to how these women defined their roles and fit into the current male-dominated educational setting.

As additional studies are conducted and more is learned about women in positions of leadership, it will be possible to improve recruiting practices, training within the principal preparation programs, and mentoring programs. As a result, the number of female school administrators will grow. It will be imperative to document their experiences as their own unique perspective and to no longer assume that the male experience continues to speak for the female experience.

By becoming aware of our history as women, our stories and the story of our gender, we can progress in understanding the perspectives of others and do more to seek the best for all the children in our care.

-- Patricia F. First

## APPENDIX A

The following interview questions come directly from McGovern-Robinett's study of high school principals (2002). The questions have been modified to focus on the middle school principal.

### Interview Protocol (First Interview)

I am researching women's experiences as middle school principals, particularly how they construct their roles as middle school leaders and how gender influences that construction.

1. Tell me about your background and how you have arrived at your current position.
2. What influenced you to become a middle school principal versus teaching? Elementary principal, etc.?
3. How would you describe your leadership role(s) as a middle school principal?
4. What makes a good leader at the middle school level? In what ways do you think your male middle school colleagues share this belief and in what ways do you think their beliefs differ? Why do you think that's so?
5. Please elaborate on how your preparation at the university or other institution for this job has or has not adequately reflected the skills you have needed as a female secondary leader.
6. Some researchers claim that school leadership definitions and research come from a privileged perspective. What do you think of that claim?
7. What do you think are your greatest challenges?
8. Have you ever felt that your gender has been a challenge in your role? If so, tell me about that.
9. How is being a female middle school principal different from being a male middle school principal?

10. What leadership contributions do you think female principals make in the secondary/middle school realm?
11. Describe what it is like to be a female in a male-dominated occupation within your building, interacting with different groups, at conferences, etc.
12. What do you think about the underrepresentation of women in the middle school principalship? What do you think explains the numeric inequality among men and women at the middle school principalship level?
13. In what ways do your expectations at home and those you have as a principal come into conflict?
14. When you first took your job, I am sure that many different groups had expectations of you. What do you think your school community expected/s from a female middle school principal?

Your staff?

Students?

Parents?

Central Office?

Other middle school principals in your district?

15. Do you modify your behavior around any of these different groups? How? Students, parents, faculty/staff, other principal colleagues.
16. As a middle school principal, have you ever felt you were being ignored or couldn't get your way because you were a woman? Tell me about how you persevered.
17. How do you think gender matters for your male colleagues, how they perceive themselves and how they are perceived? How does it matter to you?
18. Your school is obviously successful. How do you explain your success as a middle school principal?

19. Imagine your were called by the university to teach a class of aspiring female middle school principals. What lessons have you learned that you would share with them or what advice would you give?
20. Anything else you'd like to share.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Interview Protocol (Second Interview)**

The following questions come from additional research I've read throughout this project and also questions I've come to wonder about after conducting some of the site visits with the research participants.

1. Can you please identify an important overall school policy or practice for which you were responsible?
2. Can you tell me about a specific policy or practice about sex or race equity for students that you were responsible for?
3. As a campus administrator, I'm sure you have to wear many hats. What are some of these hats and how do you allocate your time when on the campus? (If mention being an instructional leader, ask: "What percentage of time do you spend being the instructional leader of your campus?")
4. Share your thoughts with me about what it was like to transition from a teaching culture that is predominantly female to an administrative culture that is predominantly male?
5. In your own career path, did you ever experience sex discrimination?
6. Since our first interview several weeks ago, have you given any thought about how you do your job and if your gender plays any role in that?
7. Once you became an administrator, were you ever treated differently based your gender?
8. What is your philosophy on feminism?
9. In our previous interview, we discussed the small number of female middle school principals that lead schools across the nation. What are your thoughts on this topic?
10. What are your thoughts about a glass ceiling as it pertains to females? Have you experienced a glass ceiling in your career?



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